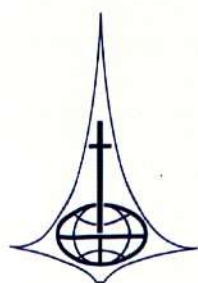


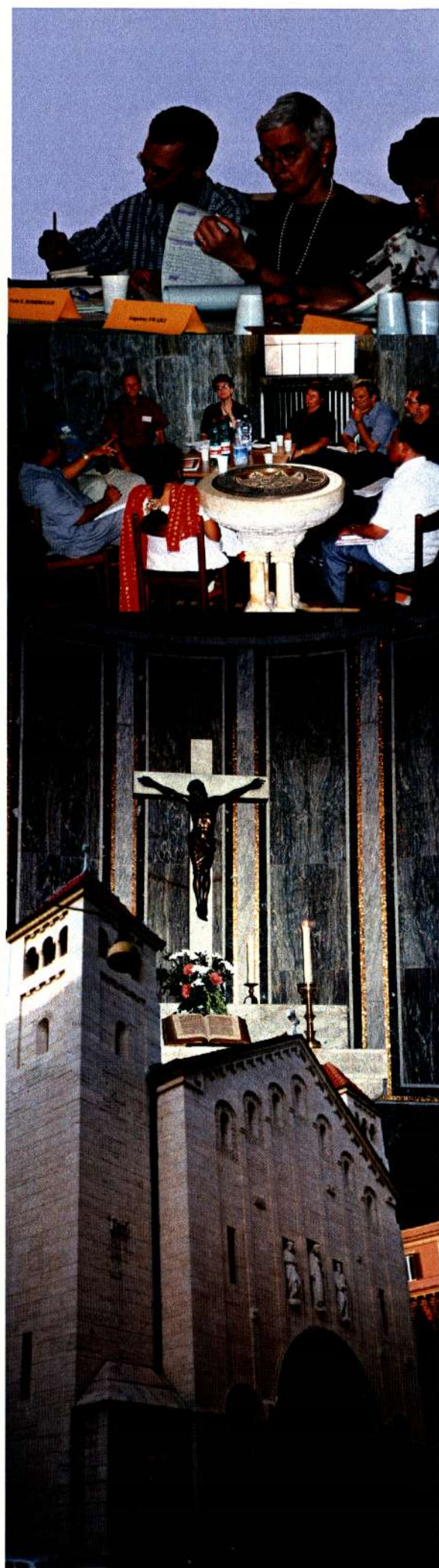
# LWF Global Consultation Theological Education

August  
23 to 27  
1999  
Rome  
Italy

# Report



The Lutheran World Federation





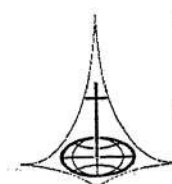


# REVISIONING THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

LWF Global Consultation on Theological Education

August 23 to 27, 1999  
Rome, Italy

Report



## THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND - FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL - FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

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The opinions expressed in this publication reflect the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the Lutheran World Federation.

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## FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that we present to you the report from the Lutheran World Federation Global Consultation on Theological Education held in Rome, Italy, from August 23 to 27, 1999. The report contains the text of invited presentations, as well as summaries of responses, conversations and suggestions that emerged from the interaction of participants meeting under the theme: *Revisioning Theological Education*.

The primary purpose of the consultation was to start a process of re-visioning and re-thinking theological education within the global Lutheran communion. Entering a new millennium, we are acutely aware of the forces of global change which affect every nation, community and church, and ultimately every person. In this context, participants were asked to address the issues and questions that challenge the current practices of theological education. This report begins the conversation *to re-vision theological education* - not in the sense of *revising an earlier vision*, but beginning the conversation *to develop the vision from today's context and perspective*.

The objectives of the consultation were:

- to review the field of theological education in view of the challenges of global theological issues, as they relate to the efforts of contextualization;
- to begin a process of re-visioning and re-thinking theological education from the perspective of Lutheran identity in context, feminist theology, transformation, ecumenical education, and sustainability;
- to provide an opportunity for the exchange of experience and expertise in theological education;
- to encourage the establishment of global networks of theological education among the LWF member churches.

The consultation has already begun the conversation, even before this report is published. It is our sincere desire that this report will serve as an invitation to the full community of churches, theological institutions, teachers, administrators, students and the Lutheran World Federation to continue the conversation begun in Rome - revisioning theological education for the sake of God's mission.

We want to express our sincere gratitude to the presenters who challenged and inspired us to have conversations that would serve the purposes of theological education and the whole church. We also want to express our heartfelt thanks to the congregation of the Lutheran Christ Church, Rome, for their gracious hospitality in providing facilities and office support for the consultation, and especially for welcoming us to gather for daily worship in their beautiful church. The daily worship became an integral part of the consultation, both challenging and nurturing us to anticipate the fullness of God's liberating word.

Péri Rasolondraibe  
Director LWF/DMD



*LWF Global Consultation on Theological Education*  
*August 23 to 27, 1999, Rome, Italy*  
*Revisioning Theological Education*

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## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

*LWF Global Consultation on Theological Education*  
*August 23 to 27, 1999, Rome, Italy*

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*Ms. Agneta Ucko*  
*"Greetings"*



*Rev. Dr. Péri Rasolondraibe*  
*"Revisioning Theological Education"*



## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

*Dr. Péri Rasolondraibe*

It is an honor for me, and it gives me great pleasure, to join my LWF colleagues in welcoming you to this Global Consultation on Theological Education taking place in Rome. Some of you have already asked me why we chose Rome. This was done in anticipation that the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* will be signed this year between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation. We are meeting here without the clouds of mutual condemnation hanging over our heads.

### **History: Bossey Consultation in 1975**

This Global Consultation on Theological Education is the second of its kind since the restructuring of the LWF in 1970. The first was the international Consultation on Theological Education held in Bossey, Switzerland in 1975. It is indeed good that we can meet together as theological educators from all the regions after almost 25 years. We did have literally a couple of dozen consultations on theological education in the last 25 years, but they were not global or international in scope. Like the first international consultation, there are good reasons to call for this global consultation. My task is to share with you the purpose of this consultation, and the kind of results that can be expected from our reflections and discussions.

Looking back at the history of the Lutheran World Federation, we realize that the context of the Bossey Consultation (1975) was quite unique. That was when the Department of Theology became the Department of Studies with a clear emphasis on theological and Christian education, and programs for the advancement of studies and training in all the regions, but more specifically the South and Eastern Europe. That was also when the Department of World Mission was changed to the Department of Church Cooperation, also with a clearer emphasis on the strengthening of ministerial formation within the member churches. Thus, quite naturally, the two departments and the two commissions (Studies and Church Cooperation) worked together on theological education programs. From 1970 to 1976 they co-sponsored 20 national and regional consultations on theological education in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, North America and Australia. They also planned the Bossey Consultation in 1975 to bring together and synthesize the findings of these national and regional consultations.

The objective of the Bossey consultation was "*the renewal of Theological Education in the context of the challenges of the modern world and of the Gospel in the various religious and*



*socio-political situations in which the Lutheran member churches find themselves*"<sup>1</sup> At the risk of oversimplifying the issues, one would venture to say that LWF theological education programs in the 1970s focused mostly on the South (namely, Africa, Asia and Latin America) and emphasized a holistic and contextual approach to theological education. On the one hand, theological education was to be holistic both in terms of the curriculum, calling for an intentional effort at an interdisciplinary approach (that theology should not be developed in isolation from other academic disciplines) and in terms of the total life and mission of the church. On the other hand, theological education was to be contextual not only in terms of theological content but also in terms of methods, personnel and finance.

Holistic and contextual - these are important and worthwhile concerns for theological education and even today we still appreciate their relevance. We feel, however, that something different has taken place as the turn of the century has already commenced. People point to three events marking the beginning of the turn of the century: one, the collapse of the communist bloc; two, the ending of the apartheid regime of South Africa, thus ending the official form of racism in the world; and three, the shifting of the center of gravity of world Christianity to the South where 60 percent of the world's Christians are now living. Moreover, theologians today are talking about the end of history, that is, the experience of post-modernity and post-Christendom in Europe and North America, and the onslaught of the globalization of a western world system and values to the rest of the world with its attendant information technology revolution. Today, being holistic and contextual requires going beyond one's immediate context (economic, socio-political, cultural, religious) to face the challenges and opportunities of the interconnectedness of human journeys at the planetary level without losing track of local realities.

### **The theme**

The theme of this Global Consultation is *Re-visioning Theological Education*. This theme is reminiscent of the first Third World Lutheran Theological Educators' Consultation held in São Leopoldo, Brazil in 1988. Its theme was *Re-thinking of Lutheran Theology*. The third world Lutheran theological educators then focused largely on how to keep theological discourse genuinely Lutheran while remaining authentically African, Asian or Latin American. One of the questions they raised was: How can Lutheran Confessions (e.g. Justification by faith) be taught to people in the South without first having to understand the western philosophical presuppositions underpinning Lutheran confessions?

These are noteworthy concerns and problematique and they will continue to resurface in our discussions for some time; but our theme calls for something qualitatively different. It evokes

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<sup>1</sup> Agenda, Commission on Studies, 1975, p.34

new visions not simply revision (to look once again) or rethinking. To use the terminology of car mechanics, our theme does not call for a *tune-up* but for an *overhaul* of the engine.

Among the indigenous people of North America, there is a socio-religious phenomenon or activity called *vision quest*. When the community is faced with new situations due to change, and the old visions can no longer provide an adequate solution, the community leadership will embark on a vision quest. How it is done, whether on a lonely trail or in a sweat lodge, is immaterial to the point I wish to make. The important thing is that they believed in the necessity of a paradigm shift and allowed its practice to enable the community to ride the tide of change.

We meet here in Rome to embark on a process of *vision quest* for the theological education programs of our churches and the LWF as a whole. We need new visions for our theological education programs to provide the necessary ministerial formation for responsible leadership in church and society.

### **Pointers from the Nairobi Mission Consultation**

To a certain extent, the participants in the LWF Consultation on Churches in Mission (Nairobi, Kenya 1998) have already given us some pointers. In its "Findings and Recommendations," the Consultation describes theology as

...an indispensable tool for the well-being of church and society. Therefore, theology must strengthen the mission understanding and practice of the church, and in this sense be accountable to the mission of the church.<sup>2</sup>

In ministerial formation we know that theology is for mission. What the Nairobi consultation adds to what we already know is a clear definition of mission as encompassing "proclamation, service and advocacy for justice."<sup>3</sup> This understanding of mission brings up another dimension of the holistic approach to theological education.

Another pointer from the Mission Consultation which is pertinent to our vision quest is the concept of *transformation*. I quote from the findings of the track on "Theological Study on Mission:"

The concept of "transformation" is emerging as an important mission imperative as the church, in every context, is called to be a transforming community of God's

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<sup>2</sup> *Report of the LWF Consultation on Churches in Mission* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1998), p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.



people. Transformation happens on the personal, ecclesial and societal level. It has christological, pneumatological and ecclesiological bases. Since the church is not the only agent of transformation in society, the concept offers possibility for interdisciplinary reflection and cooperation.<sup>4</sup>

If applied to theological education, the concept of transformation also reshapes our understanding of what is holistic and contextual. If the church is called to be a transforming community, what type of theological education and ministerial formation are required to equip the church to fulfill its calling? We need to catch the vision of theological education being a tool for transformation. Thus, without wishing to rehearse an ideological slogan of the recent past, one could say that with the concept of transformation, theological education will endeavor not only to understand faith within contexts but also to aim at transforming those contexts.

The Mission Consultation also discussed the fact that, since 1990, the Lutheran World Federation has declared its self-understanding that we are a communion of Lutheran churches. What are the implications of such a vision of *koinonia* to the mission of the church? For us here in Rome, what would be the ramifications of this Lutheran Communion for theological education? I think that the Lutheran vision of communion should have implications for the content of theological education - moving from an individualistic emphasis to a *koinonia*-based theology, namely the *koinonia* we have with God and with one another through Jesus Christ. And this ought to transform theological education in all the regions, not only the South. There will also be implications for methods and strategies, intentionally putting emphasis on inclusive communion and ecumenical education, and on the sharing of resources both human and financial.

I should like to take a moment here to highlight one important point, namely, inclusive ministry within the communion. The LWF has been reflecting on and discussing the ministry of all baptized persons for a long time. Special programs have been set up to promote equal access to theological education for women, and the LWF through its Assemblies and Council resolutions has advocated for women's ordination. The question that needs to be raised, however, is: How does Lutheran theological education incorporate and translate inclusive ministry into its ministerial formation? In the past 20 years, when the LWF has focused on helping theological education in the south, the usual strategy was to add supplementary courses - usually electives - to an already heavy curriculum. In different places, that has happened for indigenous or contextualized theology, feminist or womenist theology, and even ecumenical studies. What we are challenged to do is not to append women's studies or feminist theology to what is thought to be the core of theological education, but to look at

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 20.



theological education as a whole from the perspective of feminist theology, and *overhaul the engine*.

The challenge is great. For what we say about a feminist theology perspective should also be said about koinonia, transformation, spirituality and ecumenism. I thank God that theological education can still be exciting!! We are gathered here, therefore, not to rehash old findings and recommendations meant to help theological education in the South. We are on a vision quest to set off a process by which we as a koinonia, a communion of Lutheran churches, together with our ecumenical partners, will search for new visions for doing theological education in the 21st Century. How are we going to start to set the process in motion?

### **Setting the process in motion: revisionong theologiocal education**

1. The plenary presentations and discussions will introduce us to some of the major challenges we face and the opportunities at our disposal. All the presentations will be followed by plenary discussions. The three theological presentations will be followed by group discussions. It is important to note that one of the plenary presentations will deal with theological education *networking*. International networking is more than just a buzz phrase. It can be one of the most effective and efficient instruments at our disposal to share experiences and expertise between theological institutions. Some theological institutions represented here are already working on this. It is hoped that we can gain more insights on how to reach the whole family with the Internet.
2. Discussions on these plenary presentations will hopefully prepare us for the issue groups scheduled for the third day. There are four issue groups: on Curriculum, Ecumenical Education, Contemporary Theological Education and Spirituality.
3. What is the expected result of this consultation? We will publish a report from the consultation, of course! But that should not be the main result. There should be follow-up programs, on the national, regional and international level, set up to animate and implement the vision quest contained in the report. We in the LWF Geneva secretariat expect such recommendations from this consultation.

To help us identify and shape follow-up programs, allow me to give you a brief survey of the theological education programs already in place and still functioning within the Department for Mission and Development (DMD).

First, for Africa, we have an Advisory Committee on Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA). This committee was jointly established and sponsored by the Department of Studies and of Church Cooperation in 1980. ACTEA's mandate was to help member churches with overall planning for theological education in Africa, both nationally and

regionally. ACTEA was originally established for 5 years, but it has continued under DMD until the present time.

Second, for Asia, the Department of Studies established in 1975 a program called Asia Program for the Advancement of Training and Studies (APATS) with full cooperation and support from the Department of Church Cooperation. The aim of the program was to provide continuing education for church workers, lay academics, library development and the utilization of study and research facilities and personnel in Asia. APATS continues to exist. Under DMD, an Advisory Committee for Theological Education in Asia (ACTEAS) was established in 1994 to coordinate the work of APATS and the former Conference of Lutheran Theological Educators in Asia (COLTEA).

Third, in Latin America, there has been since the mid-80s a small fund for theological education activities at the disposal of the Conference of Presidents and Bishops (COP).

Fourth, there are international programs:

- The Human Resource Development Desk with its **International Scholarship Program** and **Exchange Program**. Theological training covers half of these programs.
- The establishment of **Lutheran Lectureships** at different universities in Europe (Selly Oak, UK), in Africa (Harare, Zimbabwe; Yaoundé, Cameroon; and Pietermaritzburg, South Africa) and in Latin America and the Caribbean (Cuba).
- The **Library Development Program** which still continues although with decreasing financial support. The idea was to develop seminary libraries in the South by coordinating the transfer of used books from one region to another, and also by helping in the purchase of reference books.

4. To help us articulate our findings and recommendations, we will have a Drafting Committee which will report to the plenary on the afternoon of the last day of our consultation.

5. We also have a Steering Committee which will oversee the schedule and proceedings for the consultation. Dr. Vivian Msomi, the Chair of the LWF Staff Working Team on Theological Education, will convene this committee which will include Dr. Faith Rohrbough, Bishop Wesley Kigasung and Dr. Wanda Deifelt. *Ex officio* members will be Ms Agneta Ucko and myself.

6. Our daily devotions, morning and evening, have been prepared by Rev. Silvio Schneider. He will be inviting some of us to lead the celebration. Thank you for accepting the invitation.

7. Allow me to introduce to you the key persons who are responsible for the smooth running of our consultation: Dr. Andrea Weiss with the Lutheran Church in Italy and Ms Margrit Keller, LWF DMD staff.



8. I also bring to you the apologies of two colleagues from Africa who wanted very much to attend this consultation but were unable to come due to unforeseen circumstances: Rev. Anastasia Malle from Tanzania, now finishing her doctoral studies in the USA, and Dr. Martin Nelumbu of Namibia, President of Paulinum Seminary.

I wish you a successful and blessed consultation.



*LWF Global Consultation on Theological Education*  
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## FROM THE CONSULTATION



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*August 23 to 27, 1999, Rome, Italy*

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## MESSAGE TO MEMBER CHURCHES

Dear friends and colleagues in theological education:

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, from the participants in the Lutheran World Federation Global Consultation on Theological Education, meeting in Rome, Italy, from August 23 to 27, 1999. In our commitment to theological education, we serve the church as it participates in God's mission in the world, trusting that it is God who leads us and guides us.

Under the theme *Revisioning Theological Education*, this consultation has been planned by the Lutheran World Federation team on theological education and convened by the Department for Mission and Development. Teaching theologians from Lutheran and ecumenical theological institutions in 33 countries throughout the world were invited to begin a process of revisioning and re-thinking theological education. This is the second global consultation on theological education among LWF member churches since 1970, although there have been numerous national and regional consultations in the last 30 years. During those years, theological education and theological institutions have been greatly strengthened especially in the south which is now home to 60% of the world's Christian population.

At the same time, the context for theological education and the church's mission has changed dramatically. These changes are often referred to by the term globalization which describes world-spanning changes in technology, politics, economics, migration, pluralism, secularism and the privatization of religion, to name a few. Also, since 1990 the LWF has been exploring practical implications of our affirmation that the Lutheran World Federation is a communion of churches who are united in pulpit and altar fellowship, thus changing even more the context for theological education.

In this message, we present some highlights from our discussions and reflections, so that the process of revisioning theological education may include the full community of churches, theological institutions, teachers, administrators and students. When finalized, the formal report of proceedings from this consultation will include a summary of our conversations, our identification of issues and challenges, as well as recommendations for consideration by churches, institutions and the LWF.

Our starting point considered *Lutheran Messages and the Challenge of Contextualization*, which emphasized that theological reflection must discern the burning issues of the context in order to make theology meaningful in that context. Lutheran identity is shaped by its focus on the power of the living Word of God in the midst of God's created world. In consequence, theological reflection and education should stay with the tensions of intellectual and



experiential; confessional and ecumenical; and the prophetic and servant roles in theology. The tension of the contextual and the global is particularly significant in our era of globalization. It is our assessment that the present situation calls for a re-affirmation of the need for contextualized theological education which is at the same time attentive to the interrelatedness of all contexts. In reflecting the universal address of the Christian message, and the true nature of our *koinonia*, theological education should contribute to constructing a more inclusive global community.

Three additional focuses informed our deliberations. The first, ***Networking in Theological Education***, described a functioning international network of six cooperating theological institutions on five continents. Areas for cooperation include student and staff exchanges, curriculum planning, research and publication, and the establishment of computer and information links. Thus, networking enables theological education to interconnect contextual experiences in finding its way between contextualization and globalization.

The second focus, ***Feminist Theology: A Re-thinking of Theological Education*** emphasized that feminist theological approaches relate education closer to social reality, and bring a necessary and productive focus on relationships. Feminist theological approaches enable students and faculty to find theological interpretations for the realities of diverse lives, and assist the church in addressing gender issues. It was also affirmed that advocacy for the full inclusion of women in church leadership and ministry must continue, and support to women theologians in qualifying for research and teaching positions must be strengthened.

The third focus, ***Theological Education: A Tool for Transformation***, corresponded to a recommendation of the LWF Consultation on Churches in Mission (Nairobi, 1998) to further the study of transformation as an emerging mission imperative. We have begun a conversation about transformation as a theological concept, suggesting that transformation points to the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit among and through God's people. In the context of theological education, transformation refers to the curriculum process through which students, faculty and institutions come to know the will of God, incarnate God's will in their lives (spiritual formation), and do God's loving and liberating will in the world (social transformation).

This consultation also addressed four particular topics: ecumenical education, curriculum, contemporary theological education and spirituality. ***Ecumenical Education*** is affirmed as essential for programs of theological education in our churches. Leaders in ministry must be knowledgeable about particular aspects of ecumenical relations that include ecumenical history, ecumenical participation and cooperation, ecumenical dialogue and ecumenical commitments. Ecumenical education must also include experience in particular ecumenical activities.



In the area of *curriculum*, institutions are encouraged to work closely with churches as curriculum is developed and reviewed in order to be grounded in the realities and needs of church and society, and to identify and encourage future teachers in theology. Going into the next century, curriculum development should be especially attentive to issues of contextualization, spirituality, the insights provided by feminist and other liberation perspectives, transformation and ecumenics.

In the area of *contemporary theological education*, the LWF is encouraged to facilitate and coordinate various links among theological institutions and faculty, including attention to networks, Internet discussions, library resources, and directories of faculty, programs and publications. Theological institutions are encouraged to develop online courses for continuing education for both clergy and laity, and to study gender issues.

The emphasis on *spirituality* in theological education seeks to recover our Lutheran and ecumenical spiritual traditions, to encourage development of contemporary spiritual practices, and to promote inclusion of spiritual aspects inherent to each discipline across the full curriculum. Such an effort would contribute to theological education and faith formation, and would complement attention to spirituality in all aspects of church life.

This consultation concludes with a deeper appreciation for the challenges and contexts we share, and a renewed vision for the essential role that theological education serves within the Lutheran communion and our ecumenical relationships to develop leadership for mission. Our commitment to study, learning, networking and transformation will be enriched by deeper appreciation of contextualization, feminist and other liberation theologies, and spiritual disciplines.

As the consultation ends and we leave Rome to return to our local contexts, what language shall we use when we study, teach, talk, pray and then witness in our communities? We have come to appreciate again that theological education is our critical and valued guide in developing language that is God-pleasing, confessionally faithful, ecumenically engaging and culturally compelling. We carry our conversations home, and encourage the churches, theological institutions and the Lutheran World Federation to continue this process of revisioning theological education for the sake of God's mission.

Peace be with you.

August 27, 1999  
Rome, Italy



## STARTING A PROCESS: COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

We acknowledge that this consultation is starting a process, and we anticipate that this *Report* will assist it to continue. We have carried our conversations home, and we encourage the churches, theological institutions and the Lutheran World Federation to continue this process of revisioning theological education for the sake of God's mission.

The conversations around the keynote and theme presentations, and the issue topics, generated many suggestions which are noted in the separate sections of this report. These suggestions were not formalized as recommendations by the consultation, but nonetheless are worthy of further consideration. One suggestion merits the status of being termed a recommendation.

### ONE RECOMMENDATION

Recognizing both the earnest desire and the great need to continue this conversation, the participants were of one voice in recommending *that the LWF develop a mechanism for follow-up and accountability from this consultation.*

### SUGGESTIONS

An overview of the conversations that were begun in Rome follows:

#### *Churches and theological institutions are encouraged ...*

- to continue to address the basic question: *what is the purpose of theological education?* through dialogue concerning church expectations of theological education, and addressing the ongoing tension between preparing people for ordained ministry (as currently perceived) and also dealing with change and transformation
- to develop useful tools for the evaluation of the fruits or results of theological education
- to highlight the diversity of ministries in the church (including but not limited to pastoral ministry) and develop appropriate programs and curricula



- to give comprehensive attention throughout the church to spiritual formation and gender issues
- to promote among all church members, and especially those involved in theological education, the priority of building bridges between Christian communities and seeking creative opportunities for dialogue and collaboration
- to consult regarding funding to make institutions more self-sustaining

***Theological institutions are encouraged ...***

- to teach the general hermeneutics of culture: how to analyze, discern and appropriate cultural elements with integrity
- to emphasize an ongoing process of transformation in theological education, and assist faculty to gain experience in contextualization as a tool for their own transformation
- to be intentional about spiritual formation of faculty and students, recognizing that transformation happens in relationship
- to strengthen the links between so-called foundational and practical disciplines, with a stronger emphasis on sermon preparation and preaching
- to promote the study of gender-related issues, and the integration of feminist insights and critiques across the curriculum
- to promote ecumenical studies as a discipline with its own merit, that not only focuses on research concerning what has divided the churches in the past and the current situation in interchurch negotiations, but also focuses on contemporary issues facing the ecumenical movement
- to provide training and support for faculty to offer Internet-based courses

***Churches are encouraged ...***

- to express in practical ways that theological education involves much more than preparation for ordination
- to engage church leadership more strongly in seeking ways to ensure that qualified women are accepted as leaders in ministry at the congregational level (e.g. as clergy)

- to provide continuing education opportunities for pastors so that they may interact with theological schools and give feedback on church life
- to develop programs for the ongoing spiritual formation (nurturing) of ministers and leaders at all levels
- to provide opportunities for church leaders to become acquainted with other spiritual traditions within Christianity and beyond

***The Lutheran World Federation is encouraged ...***

- to send each theological institution a copy of this report, and develop a mechanism for follow up and accountability from this consultation
- to highlight theological education for consideration in regional consultations or meetings of church leaders, and as the subject of an issue group at the next LWF assembly
- to support all theological institutions related to member churches in gaining Internet access
- to develop an Internet service group (*listserv*) of worldwide Lutheran teaching theologians to enable communication and networking
- to develop a global directory of faculty, including areas of specialization; to make the directory available on the LWF website and to send printed copies to theological institutions
- to create regional clusters of Lutheran teaching theologians, and facilitate the sharing of experiences and resources within regions and across regions
- to invite member churches to emphasize issues of gender and theology
- to carry out a study on Lutheran spiritual heritage, and provide support for sabbatical opportunities for spiritual formation

Now we encourage you to read, reflect upon and discuss this report - to continue the process of revisioning theological education for the sake of God's mission.





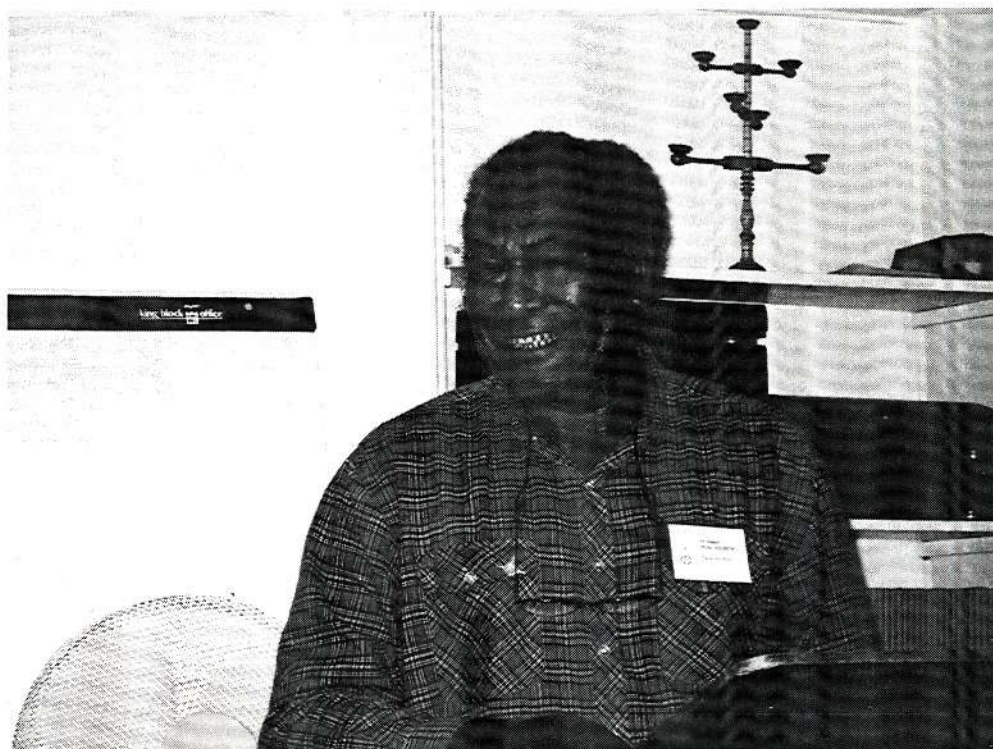
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LUTHERAN MESSAGES  
AND THE CHALLENGE OF  
CONTEXTUALIZATION

*LWF Global Consultation on Theological Education*  
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*Bishop Dr. Wesley W. Kigasung*  
*"The Message and the Context"*



*Bishop Dr. Julius Filo*  
*"The Challenge of  
Contextualization"*



## LUTHERAN MESSAGES AND THE CHALLENGE OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

Keynote Address

*Bishop Dr. Wesley W. Kigasung*

### **Introduction**

Lutheranism began as a protest and became a significant witness. It started as a debate; it developed as a continuing expression of the Christian Church. Today the growing witness of this confessional body gathers a diversity of cultural and social emphasis into a distinctive Christian community. A doctrinal consciousness, an evangelical loyalty, an ardent sense of freedom, a strong cultural unity and a dynamic urgency have typified this family of Christians.

To address the subject of "Lutheran Messages," we are faced with a challenge to return to our roots, where we find ourselves confronted with the task of revisiting the Lutheran Confessions and ask what relevance the Confessions have for us today. When talking about the Lutheran Confessions we are dealing with the Lutheran Confession of faith. These confessions of faith have sometimes been regarded as divisive or exclusive. To typify a church as "confessional" is simply to indicate that it has a theological structure and that it has attempted to state its faith concerning an understanding which has come through Scripture.

Confessions of faith are dynamic and must be expressed as an historic witness of a living faith. We are always on the edge of learning. What we believe or state as a way of life must be based on Scripture and so be relevant to our times. It must be a way of life for now. In these accepted confessions there is the repeated statement, "Our Churches teach ..." It is in this insistent dynamic of teaching that the statement of faith continues as an influence.

A significant point to be made is that the confessions are based on Scripture and I believe that it is this aspect also which must be emphasized. It has been stressed many, many times that for the Lutherans the Word is central. It is pivotal as a major theme running through the life of the church. For Luther this was the climax of his search and all other developments related themselves to the discovery that the Word of God was supreme - not church, or tradition, or any other authority. It is the Bible which he respects so highly at the center of life and so risks everything to translate the Scriptures into the language of the people.



This Word is the "norm of faith and life." It is the "manger" for the Christ or the "swaddling clothes" for the Christ, to use Luther's terms. The church's confessions of faith have value only because they grow out of Scripture. As Dr. Martin Luther puts it:

Think of the Scriptures as the loftiest and noblest of holy things, as the richest of mines, which can never be worked out, so that you may find the wisdom of God that He lays before you in such foolish and simple guise, in order that He may quench all pride. Here you find the swaddling clothes and the manger in which Christ lies, and to which the angel points the shepherds. Simple and little are the swaddling clothes, but dear is the treasure, Christ, that lies in them.

Luther's hymns show the importance of God's Word for his faith. In "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" he sings, "God's Word forever shall abide, No thanks to foes, who fear it." Similarly he prays, "Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word, Curb those who fain by craft or sword Would wrest Thy Kingdom from Thy Son And set at naught all He hath done."

Preaching is for Luther the most important activity of the church because it means that here people are exposed to the living Word of God. "When we hear God's Word proclaimed, we meet the living God today, because the Holy Spirit can make this Word so alive to us that we become Christ's disciples today just like those women and men who walked on earth with him 2000 years ago."

In his introductory remarks to his exposition of Psalm 122 in 1531 Luther says:

Among all gifts the gift of the Word of God is the most valuable. For if you take this away, it is like taking the sun away from the earth. ... For only the Word keeps a joyful conscience, a gracious God, and all of religion, since out of the Word, as from a spring, flows our entire world. Without the Word and Christ the world would not continue to exist for one moment. Therefore though there are many great gifts of God in the world, given for the benefit of man, yet the one gift which includes and sustains all the others is the Word, which proclaims that God is merciful and promises forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.

### **Lutheran identity and the challenge for relevant theological expression**

The real challenge for Lutherans everywhere is to make the message(s) relevant for the people in every context and situation. The message of the Word must become relevant for the changing times. The Word itself does not change but the application or the interpretation of that Word must be relevant for the current changing situation.

There is reason enough to study, explore and treasure the Scriptures. Christ is the living Word and we learn of Him through these Scriptures. And we learn of the Scriptures through Christ. We worship God through this knowledge of the Word and we are led to this understanding of God by the power of the Word.

Our challenge today is translating the Word into the thought-forms of our age. Luther's translation released the Word into the vernacular of his day. In our century the Word must be released into the vernacular of our contemporary crisis. This is why it requires more than quoting Scripture; it requires an entry into the tensions of today until God's living Word is dearly understood, that it is thrust into new symbols and continuing links which hold the broken-ness of mankind next to the healing grace of a loving God.

If this is understood, people are free to see the Word alive in the whole of life. It is this free flow of the Word and the lack of fear to examine, to risk and to share as a servant of God, that gives freedom to the mind and incentive to the Spirit.

We must also understand that the translation never becomes final; it is the living Word breaking through the translation. In Christ, God is dealing with mankind and in Christ we are freed from the lordship of evil. In the redemptive work and life of Christ, we find the true living Word. This is what is meant when the Lutheran Church is referred to as Christocentric. It is Christ-centered, and we know this God through Christ in faith.

Therefore, the Old Testament, the Gospels and the Epistles of the New Testament, the traditions and doctrines of the Church, the work and life of the Church are all understood from the central factor that Christ is the living incarnate Word and through him, and only through him do we come to know God. Christ is the proclamation of God and the whole life and work of the Christian must be this proclamation or witness.

The one element by which the church lives is the Word of God. Scripture must break into thought forms as well as words. Before this living Word, doctrinal interpretations, tradition and all divisive problems are ultimately subject. The Word of God is and should remain the sole rule and norm of all doctrine, and no one person's writings dare to be put on a par with it, but that everything must be subject to it.

In the contemporary situation, the Lutherans of the world have discovered their essential unity which overcomes language or other cultural heritages which had kept them from understanding one another. The matters which the Reformers declared to be secondary in importance are subject to change. As this Gospel is proclaimed and believed and people search for this living Word, there is unity, and such unity should be witnessed to the world and persistently pursued.



It is this common witness to the living Word that Lutherans bring into this new era of humanitarian and scientific research, a faith in a living and dynamic God, not in a static God hemmed and hedged. The critical study of scriptures is not a deterrent but a witness of this dynamic fact. The God who spoke to Abraham, who challenged the prophets, who reconciled mankind through Jesus Christ, who captured the imagination of saints, apostles, martyrs, moves through us and captures our minds and hearts also. The Word of God is not dependent upon the mechanical structure of Scripture. There is much hope in contemporary interest in scriptural study in the discovery of those factors that will encourage Christian unity.

Another significant factor in the challenges of contextualization is the appreciation and the application of the ecumenical nature of the Lutheran Confessions. The Lutheran Confessions are those writings which Lutherans in the 16th. Century "acknowledged as accurate formulations of their beliefs."<sup>1</sup> The Confessions are said to be based on Scripture and so we have here again the Scripture as the basis for the confessional formulations.

A statement by Edmund Schlink in regard to the significance of the confessions in relation to scripture must be noted here. He writes:

Confessions in their proper sense will never be taken seriously until they are taken seriously as exposition of the Scriptures, to be specific, as the church's exposition of the Scriptures. Confessions are not free-lancing theological opinions; they are statements of doctrine that must be understood even to their last detail in terms of that exposition of Scripture which is the church's responsibility, entrusted to it in and with the responsibility of proclamation. Confessions are primarily expositions of Scripture, more particularly summary presentation of the whole of Scripture, that is, a witness to the heart of Scripture, a witness to the saving Gospel.

The significance of God revealed in Christ is an important aspect that must always be acknowledged in the Confessions. The Lutheran Confessions, deeply concerned about the gospel, are eager to see its message proclaimed clearly and earnestly. This again is the challenge of contextualization. What are the messages of the Lutheran Confessions that are relevant for the churches today? Scholars have argued that the Lutheran Confessions are significant for the churches' correct preaching and teaching. They can serve as "a guide for the preaching and thinking of the church by indicating once again the doctrines which are central and vital. ... The Lutheran Confessions ... can give dear vision to a struggling church, and gospel vitality to a living church."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Willard Dow Allbeck, *Studies in the Lutheran Confessions* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 11.



The ecumenical significance of the Confessions is also emphasized by Allbeck who states that although the proclamation of the gospel always stands first in the practical use of the Lutheran Confessions, an ecumenical concern also occupies an important place in their use today. He writes, "It is not enough to see how these Confessions separate us from other Christians; we must see also how their testimony can identify the full message of God's Word which may unite us."<sup>3</sup> Edmund Schlink goes on to affirm that from the beginning, "the Confessions confronted all people with a comprehensive claim; they confront every man with that same comprehensive claim even today."<sup>4</sup>

### **The balance between the message and the context: the challenge of contextualization**

The task of theological education is one that requires much sensitivity and alertness and consciousness of the necessity of proclaiming the message effectively and relevantly. This requires certain skills and methods which become important and significant in the task of theological education.

Thinking and talking about "Revisioning Theological Education," we are in fact signaling the reality of an important "shift in perspective" in theology in recent years. We are also conscious of the fact that environmental changes, social changes, economic changes and even political changes have an impact on the culture of the people, so much so that they also affect their patterns of life and their thought-forms. Ultimately these changes would affect the process of doing theology and the whole process of theological reflection.

One could argue that the basic purpose of theological reflection has remained the same, namely, the reflection of Christians upon the gospel in light of their own circumstances, but much more attention is shifted to the question of how those circumstances shape the response to the Gospel.

This focus is being expressed with terms like "localization," "contextualization," "indigenization," and "inculturation" of theology. Despite slightly different nuances in meaning, all of these terms point to the need for and responsibility of Christians to make their response to the gospel as concrete and lively as possible.

A shift in perspective, concentrating on the role that circumstances play in shaping one's response to the gospel, begins to raise new questions for theological reflections. New

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 11

<sup>4</sup> Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, ed. Paul F. Koehneke and Herbert J.A. Bouman (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), p. xvii.

questions on theological reflection begin to challenge churches to find answers to the mission of the church today and tomorrow. Of course the challenge for the churches in their theological exercise is making sense of the Christian message in local circumstances.

In this shift in perspective three recurring concerns begin to challenge the work of theological education and theological reflections. Firstly, we find that new questions are being raised and these questions had no ready-made answers, and because there were no ready traditional answers the credibility of existing forms of theology was weakened. Secondly, one finds that old answers were being urged upon cultures and regions with new questions. The problem here is that old answers cannot adequately answer the new questions, and so a deepening dissatisfaction with existing approaches to theology became more and more widespread. Thirdly, the realities of new questions and old answers point to a new kind of Christian identity emerging. The theology emerging out of this new identity had particular sensitivity to three areas: context, procedure, and history. (Robert Schreiter's analysis)

Rather than trying to apply a received theology to a context, the new kind of theology began with an examination of the context itself. The awareness of how context shapes reflection, how it gives urgency to questions and shape to answers, has led to greater attention to a second aspect of this new theology: procedure. In cultures where ideas emerge and decisions are made on a communal basis, one now sees theology developing in that same way. While the professionally trained theologian continues to have a role in relating the experience of other Christian communities to the experience of the local group, the community itself takes much more responsibility in shaping theological response. Theological procedures, therefore, follow to a great extent the patterns of production of meaning within a given cultural context.

A third sensitivity in this new identity is to history. Racial, economic, sexual, and ideological dominations of many types are never far from awareness in this new identity. Histories of suffering cannot be forgotten. This is leading not only to a transformation of the present, but also to a reconstruction of our understanding of the past.

All of these factors have been combining to create an important shift in perspective in Christian self-awareness and theology. The newness of the approaches, coupled with the heightened sensitivities, raise many questions, and we find ourselves today engaging in this important task (at this Consultation) trying to answer some of these questions in the area of theological education, basically because our theological education is concerned with teaching and developing theological reflections. It is trying to make the knowledge about God become relevant for people in a particular context.



There are several approaches to take, but I would like to borrow the line of thought suggested by Robert Schreiter in his book, *Constructing Local Theologies*<sup>5</sup>. He suggested three broad categories which I think really address the issues on which we are trying to focus our attention. The three categories are: translation, adaptation, and contextual approaches. Schreiter argues that these approaches suggest not only a relation between a cultural context and theology, but also something about the relation between theology and the community in which it takes place.<sup>6</sup> The three approaches are understood as models for engaging in local theology.

The translation model has a double function, by first freeing the message as much as possible from its previous cultural wrappings. In doing so, the data of revelation are allowed to stand freely and be prepared for the next step, which is translation into a new situation. Robert Schreiter calls this "the kernel and husk" procedure. He explains:

An underlying image directing procedure is one of kernel and husk: the basic Christian revelation is the kernel; the previous cultural settings in which it has been incarnated constitute the husk. The kernel has to be hulled time and again as it were, to allow it to be translated into new cultural contexts.<sup>7</sup>

Translation models are generally the first kind of model to be used in pastoral settings, because pastoral urgency demands some kind of adaptation to local circumstances in ritual, in catechetical instructions, and in the rendering of significant texts into local languages. The basic principle behind the translation model would begin with the church tradition and adapt it to a local cultural setting.

The strength of the translation model is its concern to remain faithful to the received tradition of Christian faith. But without a more fundamental encounter with the new culture, that faith can never become incarnate. It remains an alien voice within the culture. It needs to engage in a more fundamental encounter between Christianity as it has been elsewhere, and the culture in question.

What is found to be lacking in the first approach is taken up in the second approach in what is called adaptation models. They seek a more fundamental encounter between Christianity and culture. They try to take the local culture much more seriously. The strength of this approach

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<sup>5</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 7.



is that it takes the local culture, with its own categories, much more seriously than any other approaches. It tries to respect both the integrity of the apostolic tradition and the traditions of the local culture.

The contextual models concentrate more directly on the cultural context in which Christianity takes root and receives expression. Whereas the adaptation models continue to emphasize somewhat more the received faith, contextual models begin their reflection with the cultural context.

We could summarize by arguing that such exercise of doing theology involves all three models of translation, adaptation and contextual. Translation and adaptation models raise important theological questions, but all of these questions eventually come together in a consideration of contextual models.

### **Some concluding remarks**

Our next step in this process is an important one and it is the subject of the next presentations which I should not attempt to get into. But let me leave you with this question: "What is the task of theological education and theological educators and the churches, in our efforts in 'Revisioning Theological Education?'"

I have only a few points to conclude:

1. This is a cooperative effort that requires the support of theologians, theological educators, theological institutions, and church leaders. Unless there is a combined effort, all our attempts would be meaningless.
2. In theological education we require a constant revision of the curriculum that is sensitive to the changes and the needs of the church and its members.
3. Theological education needs more qualified theological educators who have the skill and the sensitivity needed. They are theologically conditioned, culturally conditioned, and sensitive to changes.
4. Theological educators need to engage in more "confrontations" or "encounters" to address new issues for theological development and expressions.
5. Such effort requires the full support and funding of churches to achieve the desired objective.

## LUTHERAN MESSAGES AND THE CHALLENGE OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

Response to the Keynote Address

*General Bishop Dr. Július Filo*

### **Background and Perspective**

Let me first express my gratitude for the theological reflection on the relevance of the Lutheran Confessions as the living Messages of the Lutheran Churches today, which Bishop Dr. Kigasung presented in his keynote address. My remarks and questions will be an attempt to reflect on the direct impact of the key issues of the Lutheran Confessions on theological education today as highlighted in the keynote address. The main question for us in this global consultation, which is derived from the lecture we have heard, is the following: What are the consequences of these main issues of Lutheran teachings on the goals and forms of theological education in our worldwide confessional family?

For my deliberations, my own background and experience play a significant role. Our church has approximately 330,000 members, and is the second largest church in Slovakia, after the Roman Catholic Church (with 3.1 million members). Theological education of a university type is being offered at the Evangelical Theological Faculty of Comenius University, the largest university in Slovakia. The Evangelical Theological Faculty honored the president of the Lutheran World Federation with an honorary doctorate from the university in June 1999.

Let me present a short overview of the concept of theological education held by our Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia. Our faculty offers a five year masters degree program with approximately 230 students, and in addition, there are over 30 doctoral candidates. The Faculty is accountable to two authorities:

- A. Comenius University: Has authority over the academic and educational program. At the present time, there is a reduction of the number of lecture hours and expansion of the personal study program and seminar type of activities. Additionally, a new credit system is being introduced.
- B. The Church: Has the right to give or withdraw the "mission canonica" to all lecturers of theological discipline, and expects the faculty to offer a complete program having the following three goals:
  - 1. Academic studies.



2. Personal guidance in faith to students, and building a caring, Christian worshipping community.
3. Preparation for the ordained ministry and teaching, pastoral and diaconal ministry in the Church, including workshops at the faculty and internships in congregations directed towards this goal.

After graduation from our faculty and following the vicar's examination, graduates are ordained. A two-year vicarage is a further chance for development of acquired knowledge and includes several workshops for vicars and further study for the clergy examination. Aside from the further educational opportunities at the theological faculty, no church institute for vicars exists nor is being planned.

In the fall of 1999, the new theological faculty complex will be opened and has a good chance to fulfill our faculty's three goals. The complex is well equipped for academic studies, as well as for worship and communal life of the students. Two spiritual supervisors, secured by the Church, will oversee the spiritual life and missionary activities in the church in accompaniment to the academic program. The theological faculty is open to students from other churches, adding an ecumenical dimension. Students from Russia, Romania, Yugoslavia, Slovenia, Croatia, and the Czech Republic study there, adding a regional dimension. In order to satisfy the three-fold goals, future plans include extension of the length of the study program from five to six years. More study programs for vicars and better programs for theological education for the laity of the church are under development. At the moment, the Church has just started one Bible School.

This is my background and perspective.

#### **Four Issues**

I now wish to respond to four issues raised in the keynote address.

*One.* What does the centrality and the authority of the Scriptures in the life of the Lutheran Church mean for the content and shape of theological education? Quoting from the keynote address: "The Word of God is and should remain the sole rule and norm of all doctrine and no one person's writings dare to be put on a par with it but everything must be subject to it."

Under the reformatory principle, "ad fontes" (to the foundations), the discovery of the Bible messages in the original Greek and Hebrew combine to occupy a major part of our curriculum. To what extent do we remain true to this "foundation?" It would be interesting to answer this question during this consultation or with further research. Is the knowledge of Biblical languages really the only way to access the messages from the Bible at our seminaries?



Even more important, however, is the question of what kind of hermeneutical books we give to the students. The future “verbi divini” ministers must be able to understand and explain the Bible, to use Latin again, as the “norma normans” for setting the goals of our ministry and carrying out all the theological work concerning theological reflection and preparation for practice in the church.

The preaching of the Gospel as a reformatory message should be understood as a general task of communicating the Gospel in different contexts. Do the concepts of theological education in our Lutheran churches follow this general goal of preparation for the ministry: Academic theology and the preaching of the Gospel? Preaching of the Gospel as the goal for the church which is the priesthood of all believers? How to teach others to communicate the Gospel by preaching and teaching the content and the way of communication of the Gospel? Transmitting the power of salvation into the life of congregations in all aspects of life?

Do we try to show the theological wealth of our Lutheran confessional writings as biblically based and therefore also useful in our lives? How much of our curriculum responds to this goal? Are some of the problems (such as questions about infant baptism or false charismatic influence...not the useful renewal of the spirit) rooted in our disability to show the biblical quality of our Lutheran confessional theology within our confessional writings (which the keynote address clearly requested)?

*Two.* Christ is the “dear treasure” of the Scriptures, and they themselves are the “manger or “swaddling clothes” of Christ. What does the reformatory principle “Solus Christus” (only Christ) mean for the overall direction of theological education today? Edmund Schlink’s quotation could be abbreviated in the following way: “Confession in its proper sense is a witness to the heart of Scripture, a witness to the saving Gospel.”

“Salus Christus” really means or intends to direct theological education towards one goal: To bring the saving Gospel to humanity today. The only reason for Christ to be sacrificed was to give us the power of salvation.

Is this also the main goal for all Lutheran theological education? Does theological education empower people with a deep desire to let this “dear treasure” of the Scriptures, Christ the Savior, be proclaimed and offered in an authentic way?

How does theological education relate this goal to the understanding of ordained ministry? Do we challenge future ministers not to wait for adoration and signs of respect but to be missionaries in the name of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ? “Salus Christus,” “sola gratia” and “sola fide” in theological education means to offer the mind of Christ, the ability to cooperate in mission, and love to everyone, as the goal for the ministry.

What is the profile of the ministers we create through our models of theological education? Are they led by the saving interest of Christ also when shaping congregations? Are we educating them to be able to transfer the saving desire of the Spirit in creating missionary congregations? Or are we creating the profile of a minister satisfied with self-satisfying congregations only interested in their own salvation and thus isolated from Christ's saving desire, and from the world today? In this respect, reference should be made to the fruitful LWF study on the missionary congregation.

*Three.* The living theological concerns of our Church ask for contextual theological education, because of the principle to come into the homes of people with the Scriptures. "Vernacula lingua" means to look for language close to different cultures.

How much attention do we pay in our curriculum to the study of the cultures into which the Gospel should enter? Do we teach how to understand the old cultures of our nations which have been transformed or deformed by the mission of the church? Are we interested in the new culture of young and old?

It is my observation that we do not pay much attention to this task. We often take it for granted that the ability to study, interpret and use the culture exists or develops automatically in the students of theology. The result in many cases is the rejection of today's culture of the people, and isolation from the world, and therefore an inability (disability) to communicate to those who live in the midst of the present cultural trends.

To bring the Gospel in "vernacula lingua" as a reformatory principle, however, requires a serious interest in the cultures of language, non-verbal communication, and music and the arts. Our inherited and new culture present a challenge and assignment for effective theological education in the reformatory spirit.

*Four.* The key theological issues of the Lutheran Reformation present a unifying element to theological education with an ecumenical dimension and thus a challenge for endless contextualization. This was a big concern of our brother Bishop in his keynote address.

Contextualization as a task of theological education also has to have a common base, the unifying elements for theological education of the LWF member churches. We believe that many of them (if not all of them) have an ecumenical validity. Are we going to be able to redefine those unifying standards, goals and forms of theological education of our member churches in this consultation? I pray that this also will be possible with God's blessing in these next days.



## LUTHERAN MESSAGES AND THE CHALLENGE OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

Response to the Keynote Address

*Dr. Thomas Nyiwé*

### **Introduction**

I wish to express my gratitude to the Rev. Dr. Wesley W. Kigasung, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Papua New Guinea, for this excellent presentation, which provides specific materials for this consultation. My task is that of responding to this paper, and I would like to thank Dr. Péri Rasolondraibe, Director of the Department for Mission and Development of the Lutheran World Federation for giving me this opportunity.

My understanding of Dr. Wesley's presentation leads me to focus on two points which are being emphasized in the keynote address. First, what is the heart of the matter in Luther's and Lutherans' view of the Church's message, and second, how are Lutheran messages presently challenged by the many processes of contextualization that are occurring in many parts of the world and have been for many years? I will try to speak to these points from the perspective of an African theologian.

### **The heart of the matter**

A significant point has been made by Dr. Wesley when he points out that for Luther "the word of God was supreme." May I also add that Luther's encounter with the scriptures had a tremendous influence on the whole process of the Reformation. Luther considered the word of God to be the most essential tool by which God creates the Church. This connection between the word of God and the Church means that "the Church lives and is essentially held together by the preaching of the word about Christ."<sup>1</sup>

There is one clarification that needs to be made. The word of God that Luther speaks of is precisely that word which is given us by way of law and gospel. For me, it is the word of grace, forgiveness and salvation.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 290).



Mention of this is very important in this context. Contrary to the understanding of Lutheran orthodoxy in the post-Luther era, which stressed a literal word-to-word interpretation of the scriptures, especially due to divine inspiration and inerrancy, Luther stressed the distinction between the letter and the spirit of the scriptures. Even though the letter of the scriptures helps us to better comprehend the scriptures, it is, nevertheless, the Spirit which gives us a right understanding of the scriptures: a salvific understanding of the gospel in the light of the central event of the cross.

This cruciform understanding of the gospel led Luther to distinguish between what is essential and relevant and what is not, that is to say, what is considered as secondary matter or adiaphoron. For Luther, the three solas (*sola scriptura, sola gracia, sola fide*) which are influential for his whole theology emerge towards the unique solus: the *solus Christus*. As Dr. Wesley points out, God's word is here, somehow, personalized. The living Christ is the living word of God given for humanity's salvation.

Normally, the christocentric implications of Luther's and Lutherans' message are prominent here. This christocentric approach to the Lutheran message is what seems to be basic and cross-cultural to me. It is true that with the passage of time and the numerous changings of context, Lutheran messages have undergone all kinds of changes. But it is also true that the christocentric approach to the gospel message has persisted unchanged throughout the five centuries of Lutheran history. Even though the gospel message has been translated into numerous languages throughout the world, Lutherans have always emphasized the christocentric approach to the gospel message. We all know Luther's christocentric slogan: "*was Christum treibet*" (what conveys Christ). A Christian message which does not convey Christ is not relevant to our Lutheran way of understanding Christian faith.

Dr. Wesley also speaks of the relationship between scriptures and the Lutheran confessions. Some non-Lutheran Christians have questioned the Lutheran emphasis on the issue of confessional writings. Concerning this question, it is vital to assert that Lutheran confessions are based on the scriptures. Carl Braaten emphasizes, "they say very little about themselves."<sup>2</sup> Braaten also adds that the Lutheran confessions "subordinate their witness to the holy scriptures of the Old and New testaments."<sup>3</sup> At this point it is important to mention, in agreement with Dr. Wesley, that there is not and should not be a dichotomy between the scriptures and the Lutheran confessional writings, which Dr. Wesley describes as "historic witness of a living faith." Our historic confessions are silent witnesses that point us towards the scriptures, and whenever the confessions are no longer clear, we should refer to the

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<sup>2</sup> Carl E. Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

scriptures which are "the norm of faith and life." It is through the word and the sacraments that we meet the triune God who always comes to us and makes himself known to us. Preaching this living word should always be the most important task for the church and its clergy. Thus, as far as I am concerned, to be a member of a confessional church is not a matter of exclusivity. It is rather a matter of self-identification. Through our confessional church we are enabled to live the oneness of the unique church of God in all of its human diversity. We do not strive to be exclusive towards the other members of the Christian family who do not share our particular faith. As members of a confessional church, we are aware that we also share a common faith in one undivided person: Jesus Christ, the revealed God, who shows us who God truly is.

### **Contextualization**

The second half of my reflection focuses on contextualization. How are Lutheran messages presently being challenged by the many processes of contextualization that are occurring in many parts of the world and which have been occurring for many decades?

Professor Duane Olson, who taught Mission at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, USA, wrote: "There are two things about contextualization of which one can be sure: (1) that every Christian community in the world is doing it, and (2) that Christian communities have always been doing it. They may not always do it consciously and they may not always be doing it well, but they are most certainly doing it."<sup>4</sup> Contextualization has become an important theological word during the course of the last four decades of Christian history in the so called "third world." As it was the case everywhere in the "third world," the challenging missiological question in Africa was how to make the gospel message more relevant to the people in their specific context.

Methodologically, this question led many African theologians to adopt various approaches that could help in being more relevant in their process of theologizing. For example, in the Southern part of Africa, theology has sometimes been a struggle against all enslaving and dehumanizing forces. In this context, in order to respond and relate their gospel message to their search for a fuller human life, theologians spoke of black theology, theology of liberation, and African theology. A careful study of these theologies provides a clear understanding of the specific context in which theology is done.

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<sup>4</sup> Duane Olson, "Contextualization - Everybody's Doing It," *Word & World* Vol. X, No. 4): p. 349.



In the Eastern and the Western parts of Africa, theologians spoke of contextualization, enculturation, or incarnation of theology. The idea behind the issue of enculturation is that one should proclaim the gospel to the people from within the perspective of their culture.

Presently, most African theologians speak of the theology of reconstruction. This is a theology which tries to transform the alien Christianity that has been imposed upon African Christians into something that is viable for modern Africa. But how do these African discourses on the varieties of theology relate to the question of the relevance of the gospel message in a specific context?

Gerhard O. Forde, one of the prominent professors of systematic theology at Luther Seminary, wrote a book entitled *Theology Is for Proclamation*.<sup>5</sup> The title of the book speaks by itself. A theology concerned with the gospel message and its proclamation needs to be sensitive to the theological thought-forms of the people to which the proclamation is destined. This is what contextualization is all about. Theology is what happens when, thanks to the proclamation of the gospel, faith and life meet. From this perspective, one can rightly affirm that in light of the scriptures, contextualization is the mother of theology.

African theology came into being because of the need for proclamation. As Dr. Ambrose Moyo (Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe) once said, "Africa carries out its God-given mission under very difficult circumstances." Theology in Africa, a down-to-earth theology which is not based on superficiality, is inseparably bound to the African situation. When speaking of revisioning theological education, this situation should be taken into account. Let me raise one final question that I believe Dr. Wesley has not addressed. Contextualization has to do with the shaping of faith and life of Christians in their given community. What if this given community is a tribal-based community, which is not willing to be open to other communities? I think it is important to discuss this matter of ethnicity, which for me is one of the questions of contextualization that challenges the proclamation of the gospel message.

To conclude, I hope Dr. Wesley's paper has provided us with some answers to the question: what is the task of theological educators in our efforts in revisioning theological education? Thank you.

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<sup>5</sup> Gerhard O. Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

## LUTHERAN MESSAGES AND THE CHALLENGE OF CONTEXTUALIZATION

### *Response by participants*

Participants met in plenary session and also in regional groups to discuss the keynote address and responses. The following is a summary of observations, questions and suggestions.

### GENERAL THEMES

#### **What is the sense of contextualization in the confessions?**

The discussion regarding contextualization and the confessions raised several questions for further study: Is Lutheran tradition (beginning with Martin Luther) deeply contextual? Or, is Lutheran tradition anti-contextual? Is the traditional understanding of Lutheran theology—justification by grace through faith—open for contextualization and social justice within holistic ministry? What are the resources to enable us to contextualize Luther and the Confessions today?

#### **Contextualization and culture**

Contextualization is not just a matter of *doing* theology but of *living* theology. Thus we focus on the enhancement of contextualization because it has already begun. Do we take for granted that we have the gospel and then study culture to learn how to transmit it? Or do we redefine the gospel on the basis of our contextual discoveries? How do we ensure that we are communicating the gospel and not merely culture?

The Christian message always carries a specific cultural expression in a particular context (“a treasure in a manger”). Contextualization must de-clothe the scriptures of cultural elements through exegetical and hermeneutical methods, then re-clothe it with clothing appropriate to the reader or listener.

It is acknowledged that contextualization means different things in different places depending on the history. In some places it involves recovering what has been lost; in other places it means doing mission in new ways. In all places there is a larger culture outside the churches which needs to be heard and addressed.



### **Context as local and universal**

Taking context seriously must also take account of the universal or common; otherwise contextualization creates isolated communities of action and meaning. There must be a dialectic to balance a universal or common base with contextualization. It must be remembered that the confessions and scriptures also come out of contexts, and themselves embody or reflect the tension of the universal and the context. Contextualization is important not only because it deepens the understanding of a tradition within a context, but also because it enriches people and churches across contexts. This suggests the desirability of intentional efforts to share information and experiences across contexts (e.g. throughout a region and beyond). It also highlights the need to look for the common ground between plurality and community.

### **The languages of culture, church and faith**

We need to learn how to distinguish between the language of church and the language of context or culture. If students do not bring the language of culture, how do we ensure they learn that language and the ability to keep learning it?

Professional advertisers talk about the different languages of different generations. The church has not appropriated this awareness. We receive students and speak "the language of church" with them. We do not listen to them and learn how to speak their language. Some evangelism courses use this awareness to bring people into the church and yet not to change the church. The church has always been multi-generational. How do we prepare pastors to move among different languages? How do pastors become multi-lingual?

The church growth movement stresses the language of culture, while many in the church react against "entertainment evangelism." How can we keep the content of the gospel and not water it down?

So many of our students are illiterate in their understanding of the faith. Given this reality, and knowing that language is dynamic, for some reason we still try to keep the language of faith static. How do we allow the language of faith to evolve?

### **BURNING ISSUES**

In order to contextualize, we must be aware of the burning issues in our particular context (issues that challenge us and the gospel message). Several burning issues were identified.

**Ethnicity:** We tend to go back to where we feel at home. Sometimes that takes us back to the traditions of our ethnic community. Often we find that barriers are built around ethnic communities, or tensions arise between ethnic groups.

In Africa, ethnicity is often experienced as tribalism in a negative sense. One wonders if there is openness to allow the gospel to transform our relationships with other tribes.

In North America, ethnicity has often been experienced in different worship styles, pieties and church polities associated with the founding ethnic churches.

**Syncretism:** Traditional religions and new age movements raise important contextual issues. It is important to consider how the past affects the present. For example, liturgy can be used to remember ancestors, which is important in most African communities.

Fear of syncretism has restricted theological expression. For example, indigenous music and dance are regarded as pagan without recognizing that religious piety has always and in all places been conditioned by culture. Some other churches are bolder in seeking authentic ways to incorporate indigenous expression into Christian spirituality and worship.

**Globalization:** Globalization is mostly understood in terms of economics although its effects are much more pervasive. How do we recognize globalization and its manifestations? Younger generations are generally comfortable with globalization. One example of globalization's impact is that people in Asia are not much concerned about past colonial days, but about the future. Furthermore, the emergence of many mega-cities in Asia creates contexts that are no longer culturally homogeneous.

We need to engage in dialogue with the proponents of and actors in globalization, raising theological issues as legitimate for such a dialogue. How do we keep ourselves thinking enough to know that the theology is important? Perhaps globalization also impacts ecumenism, forcing us in all places to struggle with our Lutheranism and ecumenism. How do we appreciate what each of us brings to the whole understanding of the church?

**Poverty:** The persistent and pervasive reality of poverty continues to make poverty a life-and-death issue for millions of people. Continuing underdevelopment combined with the abuse of human rights means that whole communities and nations are daily at risk for basic survival.

**Language:** The church growth movement stresses the appropriation of the language and symbols of culture, while many in the church react against "entertainment evangelism." How can we keep the content of the gospel and not distort it or water it down? At the same time, certain words or phrases can take on certain meanings within the church without a common sense of what is meant. We often do not understand each other in our church languages.



## THEMES IN THE REGIONS

The **Latin America and the Caribbean** discussion group raised some of the basic questions for our consideration. When they asked, "what is the purpose of theological education?" their response was "leadership for mission." This includes pastoral preparation, training of laity, diaconal training, and preparing theologians and teachers.

From lively experience in their region, they emphasized that contextualization means different things in different contexts. They asserted that theological education must stay with the tensions it encounters: intellectual and experiential; the prophetic and servant role; both Lutheran and ecumenical; the pull of globalization and the risk of syncretism; and contextualization as particular (distinct) and universal (common). They also warned of the narrowness of resources that shape our theological education: the actual place and context of education; theological writers and their cultural and educational contexts; and books and periodicals which reflect particular biases.

The participants from **Africa** contributed the basic focus in identifying the burning issues mentioned above, especially ethnicity, syncretism, globalization and poverty. It was noted that African Lutherans can and must be more active in advocacy relating to poverty and human rights. Advocacy can be taught in the theological disciplines and encouraged among pastors and other church leaders.

Regarding ethnicity, it was suggested that the starting point should be honest affirmation of the reality and distinctiveness of each tribe, emphasizing the existence of different tribes as gifts from God; our unity in faith; and the means of grace for all tribes and not just some. In the setting of theological education, students should be encouraged to talk about tribalism rather than avoiding it.

It was also noted that lack of publication resources hampers contextualization in Africa. There is need to encourage more research and publication among African theologians and religious educators.

The **Asia Pacific** region is characterized by rich diversity in religion, culture, language and socio-economic situations. Great changes are also expected in the next century and millennium. Intentional efforts have been made to contextualize theological education and church activities. For example, the Hong Kong seminary buildings are distinctly Chinese in architecture, and an Easter choir concert included commemoration of family members and ancestors.

Church members tend to be conservative when it comes to church practices and expressions of faith, and resist anything different from what they have been taught through generations as

Christian. Thus it is critical to train and nurture skilled pastor-theologians who can educate and support church members for appropriate and paced change. To nurture transformation there must be a good relationship of trust between teacher and students, and between pastor and members. In the context of trust, change can be addressed. In this sense, revisioning theological education involves not only the context but also the process.

The participants from the **Europe** region reported several themes in European culture, beginning with the questions, "What is the meaning of life, and does faith really impact on life?" Other themes mentioned were: ethics and the contribution of theology to ethical discussion; concern with emptying churches and aging membership; the need to incorporate the history of other religions into religious instruction in schools; the role of church and faith in pluralistic society; the need to counterbalance increasing individualism and independence with the benefits of marriage, family, community and interdependence; the need to counterbalance materialism and commercialism with the truth that salvation is free, and that all creation is free and belongs to all.

From the **North America** region, participants identified the incongruence of strong, isolated interest parties and movements in ecumenism. How is contextualization contradictory to ecumenism? Contextualization as dialogue is often absent in North America. There is a long history of separated ethnic communities in the Lutheran church, and also groups separated by doctrine or ideas. In spite of mergers, it seems that there are more distinct groups in the church today than ever before. It was noted that the division between east and west has not been overcome in the church in Canada.

It was also felt that in North America competing concepts of truth promote relativism as truth, so groups coalesce around interests. In the area of social ministry, there is a working pattern of cooperating in social ministry with theological talk later or only when a problem emerges. Participants wondered what is in the new interest in spirituality. They acknowledged a spiritualized context with no way to test the spirits, saying that we have not a spiritual desert but a spiritual jungle.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION**

Possible implications for theological education are grouped in response to three questions.

### **What is the role of theological education?**

- The basic question remains: what is the purpose of theological education?
- Theological education has a crucial dialectical role developing leaders to serve the church while also training leaders in the ongoing prophetic critique of the church.



- Theological education needs to promote the freedom the church provides for people to relate to each other across the boundaries present in a rigid society.
- Does "professionally trained theologian" mean only academically trained? What can the church require?
- Many students struggle with the issue of vocation.
- The heart of theological education should be service in the church.
- Ask the churches what they expect of theological education.

### **What are the goals and results of theological education?**

- In theological education, the intellectual training of pastors and leaders is not sufficient by itself. More needs to be done to help students grow in their spiritual and personal formation, including their emotional well-being and experience of faith.
- Goals in theological education often come from the university and society, and can focus too much on results or fruits, often with a desire to preserve an emphasis on traditional subjects. At the same time, where theological education takes place in a university setting, the university perspective and methods of evaluation can be beneficial.
- There is the danger of producing contented, isolated self-satisfied pastors and congregations.
- How can theological education prepare people for ministry and also to deal with change?
- Curricula should be evaluated based on results in the church, and should aim at transforming students according to the mind of Christ.
- In many settings, theological education currently emphasizes research, with pastoral ministry secondary (for the less gifted students).
- How do we evaluate the fruits or results of theological education? We need feedback and reflection as part of programs.

### **What are the needs of theological education?**

- In ecumenical theological education, our Lutheran identity in its essentials needs to be clear.
- In Europe, *Solus Christus* is a difficult question for students. What does *Solus Christus* mean in our current context? How can its essence be transmitted in sermons? It is very difficult to educate congregations properly on this and other issues of systematic theology.
- There needs to be more cooperation between biblical studies and practical theology (for example, helping preaching to have content and language that connects to real life).
- A pastor has to be a theologian and a theologian has to be a pastor.
- Pastors should learn to go out into society rather than waiting for people to come.

- In some ways, our seminary faculties model the individualism of the culture.
- How can we discipline ourselves to be in dialogue and reach consensus?
- Lutheranism can sometimes be too intellectual, while people often want to immerse themselves in the experience of active faith.
- If students do not bring the language of culture, how do we ensure they learn that language and the ability to keep learning it?
- How do we prepare pastors to move among the different languages of culture, church and faith?
- How do we allow the language of faith to evolve?

## SUGGESTIONS

The conversations around this topic produced suggestions that were not formalized as recommendations by the consultation, but nonetheless are worthy of further consideration.

### *Churches and theological institutions are encouraged ...*

- to continue to address the basic question: what is the purpose of theological education?
- to dialogue regularly concerning church expectations of theological education
- to address the ongoing tension between preparing people for ministry (as currently perceived) and also dealing with change
- to develop useful tools for the evaluation of the fruits or results of theological education

### *Theological institutions are encouraged ...*

- to learn from students while also assisting them to discover and interpret the language of culture
- to allow greater place in curricula for sociology, psychology, ethics, and the hermeneutics of culture
- to provide continuing education for faculty, for example to learn the current languages of culture
- to teach the general hermeneutics of culture: how to analyze, discern and appropriate cultural elements with integrity
- to prepare pastors to move among the different languages of culture, church and faith
- to strengthen the emphasis on sermon preparation and preaching (more than content)
- to strengthen links between the so-called foundational and practical disciplines
- to teach advocacy in the theological disciplines, and encourage advocacy among pastors and other church leaders
- to include "results in the church" in evaluation processes
- to affirm the need for spiritual and personal formation as well as intellectual training



- to encourage the personal witness of educators as the expression and nurture of connections between gospel and life
- to develop and embody a model for communal spiritual life

*Churches are encouraged ...*

- to provide continuing education opportunities for pastors so that they may interact with theological schools and give feedback on church life
- to encourage pastoral support groups and retreats for regular sharing and interaction
- to use a diversity of media within the church for general communication and also in worship

*LWF Global Consultation on Theological Education*  
*August 23 to 27, 1999, Rome, Italy*  
*Revisioning Theological Education*

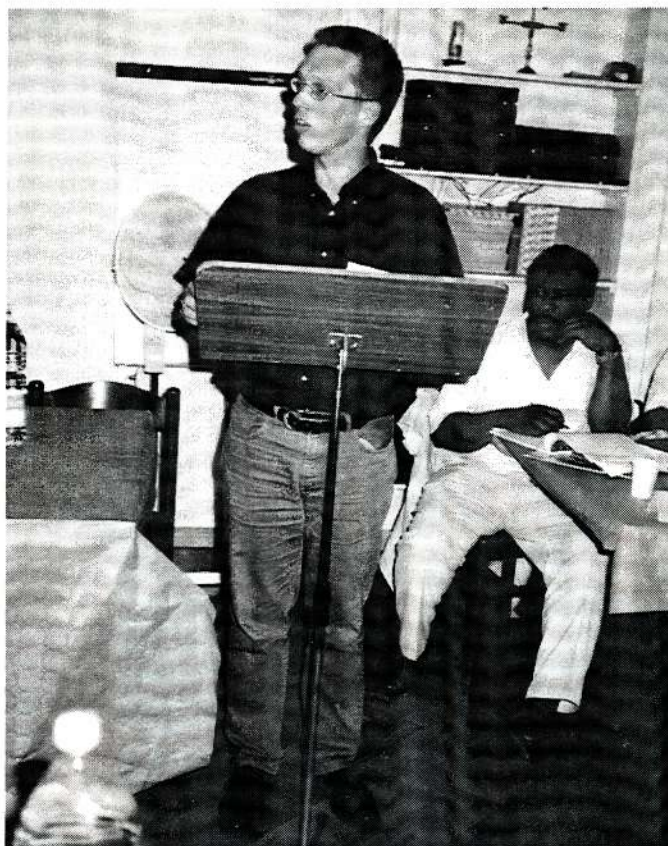
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NETWORKING  
IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION



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*Dr. Sturla J. Stålsett*  
"The INATE experience"



"Discussing the INATE experience"



## NETWORKING IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION: THE *INATE* EXPERIENCE

*(International Network in Advanced Theological Education)*

*Dr. Sturla J. Stålsett*

### **Part I: Theological Education between Contextualization and Globalization**

The turn to contextual theology and the need for contextualization in theological education seems a rather recent one. And yet, seen from one angle, it may already be outdated. It has been superseded by the mega-trend of the nineties: globalization. Globalization has been described - among many other things, and "ends" - as the "end of Geography." This would mean that the concrete context, the actual location, is in fact *losing* its significance. In the cyberworld of the late nineties everything is everywhere. Or rather, it is nowhere, nowhere *in particular*.

But is this really the case? And what would be the implications for theological education?

A relevant theological education today must find its way between the two seemingly opposite trends of contextualization and globalization. This is where I would like to begin my address to you. It is my privilege to be the co-ordinator of a quite new initiative which is an attempt to respond to this challenge. The vision behind the *International Network in Advanced Theological Education (INATE)*, and the experiences we have made so far, are of direct relevance to the theme and the aims of our consultation here in Rome. Therefore, in the second part of this presentation, I would simply like to share with you the INATE experience so far. I hope this can stimulate and inform our further discussion on theological education today.

### **Contextualization**

In his doctoral dissertation "Contextualization: Origins, Meanings and Implications," presented at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas here in Rome in 1995, William P. Russell reminds us that this term -- so central and yet still controversial in theology today -- is



in fact an invention of the ecumenical movement.<sup>1</sup> It is, furthermore, from the very beginning closely related to the field of theological education.

The first published use of the term<sup>2</sup> occurred in a booklet issued by the Theological Education Fund in the World Council of Churches in 1972, entitled "*Ministry in Context*." The Theological Education Fund, which was given the task to foster the development of theological education in Third World Churches, had adopted as a working policy that "contextualization" should be the basic criterion for all its future activities. But what did the term actually mean? Interestingly, in the booklet a relatively long and comprehensive definition is given. Russell calls this "the original ecumenical consensus statement on contextualization."<sup>3</sup> Russell's main contention is that the importance and range of this consensus statement seldom, if ever, has been recognized. Thus it should be rediscovered, he thinks, because it could show ways out of current dilemmas and impasses of ecumenism and theology today.

Let us take the time to read the whole, seven-paragraph long definition:

The third mandate's strong emphasis on renewal and reform in theological education appears to focus upon a central concept, contextuality, the capacity to respond meaningfully to the gospel within the framework of one's own situation. Contextualization is not simply a fad or a catch-word, but a theological necessity demanded by the incarnational nature of the Word. What does the term imply?

It means all that is implied in the familiar term 'indigenization' and yet seeks to press beyond. Contextualization has to do with how we assess the peculiarity of third world contexts. Indigenization tends to be used in the sense of responding to the Gospel in terms of traditional culture. Contextualization, while not ignoring this, takes into account the process of secularity, technology, and the struggle for human justice, which characterize the historical moment of nations in the Third World.

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<sup>1</sup> William P. Russell, *Contextualization: Origins, Meaning and Implications. A study of what the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches originally understood by the term "Contextualization," with special reference to the period 1970-1972.* Doctoral Dissertation, Pontificiam Universitatem S. Thomae in urbe Romae, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 9ff.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

Yet a careful distinction must be made between authentic and false forms of contextualization. False contextualization yields to uncritical accommodation, a form of culture faith. Authentic contextualization is always prophetic, arising always out of a genuine encounter between God's word and His world, and moves towards the purpose of challenging and changing the situation through rootedness in and commitment to a given historical moment.

It is therefore clear that contextualization is a dynamic not a static process. It recognizes the continually changing nature of every human situation and of the possibility for change, thus opening the way for the future.

The agenda of a Third World contextualizing theology will have priorities of its own. It may have to express its self-determination by uninhibitedly opting for a 'theology of change', or by recognizing unmistakable theological significance in such issues as justice, liberation, dialogue with people of other faiths and ideologies, economic power, etc.

Yet contextualization does not imply the fragmented isolation of peoples and cultures. While within each diverse cultural situation people must struggle to regain their own identity and to become subjects of their own history, there remains an inter-dependence of contexts. Contextualization thereby means that the possibilities for renewal first of all be sensed locally and situationally, yet always within the framework of contemporary inter-dependence which binds both to the problems of the past and present and to the possibilities of the future.

Finally, contextualization, while it stresses our local and situational concerns, draws its basic power from the gospel which is for all people. Thus contextualization contributes ultimately to the solidarity of all people in obedience to a common Lord.<sup>4</sup>

Russell is probably right in assuming that if this very rich definition had not been ignored to such an extent, many rather exhausting debates on the true nature of contextualization, its possibilities and dangers in theology and theological education, could have been avoided. Instead, one could have carried on with the task itself.

Nevertheless, in engaging in that task today, the obstacles one encounters are certainly not merely due to unsatisfactory comprehension of what contextualization is or could be. The

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<sup>4</sup> *Ministry in Context*, pp 19-20, quoted in Russell, *Contextualization: Origins, Meaning and Implications*, pp. 11-12.



validity of the 'contextual turn' in theology may appear to be challenged by the recent developments characterized by the almost mythic neologism 'globalization.'

### **Globalization: the End of Geography?**

The end of the millennium seems to many observers to imply several other "ends." Our time has been proclaimed as the "End of Modernity," the "End of History," the "End of Ideology," to mention but a few. Paul Virilio is among those who think that with the era of globalization, we have reached the "End of Geography."<sup>5</sup> In an article published in *Le monde diplomatique*, August 1997, he speaks of a "grand globalitarian mutation," a "global de-localization" that affects people's identity by effectively making the place they live 'disappear,' and thereby also threatening their economic subsistence. "The real city which is locally situated,(...) loses its primacy to the virtual city, a de-territorialized 'meta-city'," he says. Concrete location hardly means anything anymore, as the cybernetic revolution has reduced the time it takes to travel long distances to close to zero. Presence has become presence at a distance; it has become televised omnipresence or, in Virilio's word, "téléprésence."

If contextualization means being sensitive to the local setting and situation, this process of de-localization could seem to turn it into an outdated strategy. What is the use of paying attention to the local context, if the local context does not make any difference anymore? This would, however, be a premature conclusion. Contextualization and globalization are not as opposite tendencies as they may seem at first glance.

Zygmunt Bauman has recently taken up Virilio's observation and developed it further in his critical analysis of the human consequences of globalization.<sup>6</sup> What we see in our day is a "time/space compression,"<sup>7</sup> "the annulment of temporal/spatial distances,"<sup>8</sup> he argues. Bauman's main point, however, is that "rather than homogenizing the human condition, the

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Virilio, "Fin de l'histoire, ou fin de la géographie? Un monde surexposé," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, August (1997).

<sup>6</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), pp. 12ff.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.18.

technological annulment of temporal / spatial distances tends to polarize it.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, globalization is not a uniform, unifying process. Much to the contrary, it divides by excluding millions and millions of people: “Globalization divides as much as it unites; it divides as it unites - the causes of division being identical with those which promote the uniformity of the globe.(...)What appears as globalization for some means localization for others; signifying a new freedom for some, upon many others it descends as an uninvited and cruel fate.(...) Being local in a globalized world is a sign of social deprivation and degradation.”<sup>10</sup>

Social polarization and exclusion are severe consequences of the process of de-localization in the globalized world, if we are to believe Bauman. He finds support in John Kavanagh of the Washington Institute of Policy Research, who calls globalization a paradox: “while it is very beneficial to a very few, it leaves out or marginalizes two-thirds of the world’s population.”<sup>11</sup>

Now, in order to discover and evaluate this ‘reverse side’ of globalization - the exclusion, marginalization of two-thirds or more of the world - it is crucial to pay close attention to what is going on *locally*. What happens to the local communities: to women; to the unemployed; to children - here?

It was the urgency of taking seriously the daily reality of these “two-thirds” that prompted the ‘contextual turn’ in theology, “...recognizing unmistakable theological significance in such issues as justice, liberation, dialogue with people of other faiths and ideologies, economic power, etc.” Furthermore, as we have seen, those who promoted ‘contextualization’ as a primary concern in theological education were right from the outset aware of the *inter-dependence* of contexts.

It becomes clear then, in my view, that rather than undermining the need for a contextual approach to theological education, the process of globalization makes it become even more urgent. But it also adds some particular aspects to the challenge.

One such aspect is the need to pay even more attention to the quest for a new kind of universal relevance, a universality which is neither that illusory universalism of Eurocentric modernity, nor that “globalitarian,” excluding universality of globalization. It is the task of contributing to the construction of a “world in which there is room for many worlds” - to borrow a Zapatista slogan. Any theologically trained and ecumenically sensitive mind - i.e.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted by Bauman, Ibid., p. 71.



all of you - will, of course, already have tuned your thoughts into the debates on *oikomene*, *oikodome*, *koinonia* and - particularly in the LWF setting - *communio* in recent ecumenism. And yes, these debates and reflections are ever more relevant, as theological education faces the twin challenges of contextualization and globalization. But they need to become operational. They still need concretization. They need to be translated into actual experience for church members, theological students and professors alike. How do we do that? What kind of instruments and methods can be used; what new initiatives do we need?

### **Networking: Interconnecting Contextual Experiences**

Just like "globalization." and closely related to it, "networking" is the order of the day. I am not only referring to the marvels of the Internet (which, as a matter of fact, is accessed by a much smaller part of the world's population than what is often taken for granted). In my local congregation in Oslo, our deacon works actively with socially marginalized people in order to raise their awareness of their existing social networks. Because it is only by being aware of the network you have, that you can make constructive use of it. And only then can you work on expanding it or even replacing (parts of) it.

There are, of course, many advantages with networks. They are multidirectional and flexible. They can be cost-saving by making more rational use of human and financial resources where they are at hand, and distributing these effectively to other places. They can be time-saving by avoiding the duplication of efforts.

There are also possible disadvantages. The opportunities they offer may be so overwhelming that one actually loses oversight and control, and they become, suddenly, more time-consuming than the opposite. There is a considerable difference between being interconnected by way of a network, and finding oneself tangled up in one - caught like a fish.

Still, there can be no doubt that building networks is a fruitful and effective way of making the *koinonia* / *communio* concrete, of constructing a different kind of universality. By interconnecting contextual experiences it can be a way of taking the local, everyday lives of often-marginalized people and communities seriously in theological work and church action. It can be a way of building an *inclusive* globalism where the present neoliberalist globalization promotes an accelerating process of exclusion.

Moreover, it is a way of taking *advantage* of the opportunities offered by the technological innovations that globalization offers, and using them in a *resistance* to the negative effects of the same process.

With this in mind, I now turn to our experience with the International Network in Advanced Theological Education. What is it? How did it come about? What has been accomplished so far?

## **Part II: The International Network in Advanced Theological Education (INATE)**

### **Background**

The idea of a network of co-operating theological institutions was initially developed in conversations between representatives from the *Escola Superior de Teologia* in São Leopoldo, Brazil, and the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo (in close contact with two other institutions in Oslo: The Seminary of Practical Theology, University of Oslo and the Diakonhjemmet College). At that time, in 1995, there already existed a bilateral co-operation between the two faculties in Oslo and Brazil. Evaluating this co-operation, the need for South-South exchanges was highlighted by the Brazilians. Theological seminaries in the South, particularly strong ones such as the *Escola Superior de Teologia*, had quite good opportunities of establishing co-operation with seminaries and universities in the north, it was pointed out. This was good and fruitful for both parts, but still, it seemed much more difficult to accomplish an interchange of experiences gained in the different regions in the South - experiences that could be of even higher relevance to the churches and communities. Why not expand our co-operation? Thus, the idea of a network was born.

Another four institutions were contacted, who all expressed keen interest in the idea. These were: The School of Theology at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa; Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute in Chennai, India; Lutheran Theological Seminary in Hong Kong, China; and finally the Evangelical-Lutheran Theological University in Budapest, Hungary. The International Network in Advanced Theological Education, as it was later to be called, thus includes two institutions in Europe (the three Norwegian institutions form one partner in the Network), two in Asia, one in Africa and one in Latin-America. This gives the Network a broad and varied basis for its purpose - to develop a contextual theology that corresponds to both local and global challenges.

As a preparation for the implementation of such a network, a consultation was held between representatives of the institutions in Oslo, on August 11-13 1996. The goal of the consultation was to find practical ways forward. There were representatives present from all institutions



mentioned. A *Letter of Intent*<sup>12</sup> was signed by all participants in the consultation, which stated, in part, in the Preamble:

We, the participants in this consultation recognize that theology is contextual, global and ecumenical. In order to realize this vision new models of co-operation and learning are needed. As representatives from theological educational institutions in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America, we see the need for a cross-cultural, global approach to the new challenges to the theological education of the whole people of God and the various ministries of the Church. We therefore express our intention to enter into a network of advanced studies in theology, for exchange and co-operation based on mutuality and equality. The network is based on a common recognition of our strengths and competence, but also realizing our limitations. This cross cultural approach will provide a wider range of perspectives on doing theology out of the concrete experiences of people in our own societies and cultures.

We have been together in this consultation in the conviction that the church needs advanced theological education in order to fulfil its mission. We realize, however, that the theology of our educational institutions is severely challenged by the deep changes in the life and conditions of our churches and societies. We therefore need to reflect critically together on how to do theology, theological education and formation.

Having worked out in closer detail the specifics of the different educational programs to be interconnected through the exchange program, representatives from all the institutions were ready to meet again the following year. This time we accepted the invitation from Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Centre to come to Chennai, India to meet there in August 1997. At this consultation we unanimously adopted a *Statement of Cooperation* which lays out all the basic principles of the INATE co-operation. The Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, jointly with The Seminary of Practical Theology, University of Oslo, and the Diakonhjemmet College, was asked to take on the task of coordination of the Network in its first phase (1998-2001).

### **The Vision**

The vision behind the INATE initiative is thus simply to respond to the challenges to theological education in our time, which I have outlined in the first part. In other words, as it

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<sup>12</sup> *Letter of Intent, International Network in Advanced Theological Education*, Oslo, Norway, August 13, 1996. The full text is available (August 1999) on the INATE website [www.tf.uio.no/masternetwork/inate](http://www.tf.uio.no/masternetwork/inate).

was stated in our program proposal, the INATE shall "contribute to a theological education and reflection which is globally oriented, i.e. cross-cultural and ecumenical, at the same time as it is attentive to the concrete needs and challenges that are presented to it from the local context."<sup>13</sup>

More concretely, the basic idea as stated in the 1997 *Statement of Cooperation*<sup>14</sup> was "...to establish an international network for the study and development of a contextual theology, which will foster the interchange of students at advanced level<sup>15</sup> as well as co-operation between teachers, students and church-related organizations world-wide in areas such as curriculum development, research and publication."

It was decided from the outset that the thematic frame for this academic co-operation would be that of contextual theology. In line with the "ecumenical consensus statement" proposed by the Theological Education Fund, by "contextual theology" we understand a theology that is conscious of its contemporary social, cultural and political embeddedness, and, at the same time, a theology which is committed to the cause of justice for marginalized people and communities.

The main areas for co-operation are the following:

- i. Exchange of students at advanced level
- ii. Exchange of staff
- iii. Curriculum planning
- iv. Co-operation in research and publication
- v. Establishment of computer links and information exchange

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<sup>13</sup> International Network in Advanced Theological Education, *Brochure*, (Oslo, Norway: Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, 1998), p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Statement of Cooperation, International Network in Advanced Theological Education*, Chennai, India, August 1997, revised November 25, 1997. The full text is available (August 1999) on the INATE website [www.tf.uio.no/masternetwork/inate](http://www.tf.uio.no/masternetwork/inate).

<sup>15</sup> "i.e., master's degree or equivalent studies together with different forms of postgraduate studies, continuing education and other creative expressions of theological formulations related to the emerging subaltern peoples' theologies."



### **Basic principle of co-operation**

Experience shows that one of the principal challenges in international (and even more so in intercontinental) study exchange programs is to work out and agree upon procedures for and principles of mutual recognition, i.e., that the participating institutions find ways of recognizing the level and standard of each other as institutions, and more specifically, of each other's study programs. On the basis of a review of the study programs of the participating institutions and a survey by way of detailed questionnaires, the co-ordination in Oslo worked out a suggestion based on a time-for-time principle. In other words, within these programs in advanced theological education, one semester in, for instance, Madras would in principle equal one semester in Pietermaritzburg or Oslo or anywhere else in the Network, provided that the topic and theme chosen is compatible with the study program in which the student wishes to take the final exams. This principle was unanimously agreed upon in Gurukul, noting at the same time that it is an ideal principle which often will need adaptations in specific cases. The use of individual Study Contracts is one instrument for these adaptations.

### **Experiences so far**

The INATE co-operation formally started in the second half of 1998. We have now established and organized the INATE activity such as it was planned for its first period, 1998-2001. Its financial basis has been secured, thanks to the generous support and partnership of both the Norwegian Church Aid and Christian Mission to Buddhists. Its administrative structure and rules of procedures have been operationalized.

During the first two semesters seven students have spent one semester or more at another institution in the network. Three teachers have realized study visits to another INATE institution. Their own evaluation reports are positive and, interestingly, point to the advantage of both longer and shorter exchange periods. Evaluation by receiving institutions is also positive.

The Statement of Co-operation contains two important working principles, that of "mutual hospitality," and that of searching for financial support elsewhere before applying to INATE. These principles have worked very well, and turned out to be cost saving for INATE.

It should also be pointed out that the establishment of INATE co-operation has had many positive side-effects. The increased contact between the INATE institutions has facilitated

other activities at a bilateral level beyond those directly included in the INATE program.<sup>16</sup> It has also helped release other funds, and in this way had important cost saving effects.

When it comes to student exchange, we also ran into some difficulties. In the first semester, we achieved the exchange of only three students, which fell short of the aim by three. The exchange students who had planned to go to India ran into severe visa-problems, and ultimately had to cancel their trips. The candidates proposed for student exchange in 1999 - and staff exchange - were also fewer than planned. Here we have run into some obstacles that will need to be overcome in our further work. They have to do with advanced planning, well-prepared and timely applications for visa, and increased information and promotion among students in the partner institutions of the opportunities within INATE.

Another challenge is related to the workload of the INATE contact persons at the institutions, which seems to be too demanding everywhere.

In other words, we have not yet reached the level of activity that we had envisioned. Since the INATE activities are time consuming and take a lot of planning, this is perhaps not surprising. There is reason to believe that these difficulties will be overcome as the INATE co-operation proceeds and gets stabilized.

The student exchange this semester (fall 1999) points in the right direction. Eight students have left, or are about to leave for another INATE institution: one from Brazil to Norway, one from Hungary to China, one from Norway to China, one from South Africa to Brazil, two (a married couple) from South Africa to India, one from India to China, and finally, one from India to South Africa. The gender balance is also good: five women and three men among eight students.

During its short existence, I think it is safe to say that the INATE co-operation has proven its validity. This was very clear from our discussions during the second regular INATE consultation in Brazil in June this year. The theme for the consultation was "Discovering Jesus in Our Place." We had very fruitful theological discussions on contextual Christologies at the edge of the millennium, and how these relate to recent debates in the so-called 'third

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<sup>16</sup> One fine example is the continuing education course for pastors, with the theme "New Ways to read the Bible," which was organized and carried out by the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, in close co-operation with The Institute for the Study of the Bible, School of Theology, University of Natal, 1997-1998. This course included one session in South Africa, Sept. 7-28 1998. Fifteen pastors passed their exams. The evaluation was very positive.



quest' for the historical Jesus. We also evaluated the INATE activities so far, and made plans for the next biennium.

In 2001 we will evaluate this experience of networking in theological education, and hopefully, proceed to a second phase, with a slightly expanded network. I say slightly, because, we have agreed not to grow too quickly. Six partners has so far seemed to be a workable size.

## APPENDIX

### **Brief presentation of the INATE institutions and their study programs**

The institutions participating in the International Network in Advanced Theological Education are all leading academic institutions in Christian theology in their contexts, not only on national levels, but also to some extent on regional levels. Though they belong predominantly to the Lutheran tradition, they are all ecumenically oriented. All of them except The Evangelical-Lutheran Theological University in Budapest, Hungary offer Master programs with contextual emphases. The main medium of education in these courses is English, except in Brazil, where classes are given in Portuguese. Both in Budapest and São Leopoldo, they are working towards offering some courses in English for the benefit of the Network exchange.

The *Escola Superior de Teologia* in São Leopoldo, Brazil offers courses with an emphasis on Latin American theology and tradition, such as "Latin American Biblical Hermeneutics," "Protestantism in Latin America" and "Religious Movements within Latin America." The general aims of the Master's Program are to offer to the students a wide knowledge of the methods and the main themes in the elected area of concentration in a Latin American perspective, and to provide an opportunity to deepen study in one of these themes through the writing of a thesis (dissertation).

The *School of Theology at the University of Natal* in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, with its Institute for the Study of the Bible, also gives emphasis to contextual readings of the Bible and the particular challenges to theological education in the present South African situation. The Master program has five streams:

1. Master's by thesis alone in any discipline.
2. Master's Course Work in the following: Systematic Theology, Old Testament, New Testament, History of Christianity, Practical Theology. The major thrust of the program is contextual, seeking to address the theological questions of Africa in a holistic fashion, while providing advanced training in a specific theological discipline.
3. Master's Course Work in Leadership & Development. This degree addresses the need for reconstruction and development in the Third World / Africa and the role of the church as an agent of transformation. It examines the Biblical, theological and historical foundations of this task, as well as the theoretical and practical aspects of development (including secular development theory).



4. Master's Course Work in Integrated African Theology offered by the African Theological Fellowship. This degree seeks to provide a contextual program in African Evangelical Christianity, which is both cross-cultural and interdisciplinary and which promotes the development of a specifically African contribution to theology. The degree is offered in co-operation with the Akrofi-Kristaller Institute in Ghana
5. Master's Course Work offered by St. Joseph's Theological Institute (Catholic) This program focuses on the needs of the Catholic community in Southern Africa for the development of an African program at postgraduate level for those in the religious life, but is not exclusive to those in orders.

The *Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Centre* in Chennai (Madras), India, offers a variety of options on Master's level. The primary purpose of the program is "to equip men and women at a higher academic level for the various ministries of the Church, particularly relating to contemporary challenges that the church in India faces in the context of religious awakening and cultural pluralism, the issues of poverty and justice, and the concerns raised by liberation movements." Its most original focus drawn from the Indian context is the development and study of *Dalit theology* - theology of the untouchables, the casteless. The challenges raised to Christian theology from the presence of other living faiths are also reflected in its curriculum.

The purpose of the *Lutheran Theological Seminary* in Hong Kong, China, is according to its self-presentation, "to nurture learners from Hong Kong, mainland China, Taiwan and other parts of the world to be faithful servants of the church, both as clergy and lay people, being concerned with society and being interested in continuous self-growth." Through its Master of Theology program, the LTS provides specialized training in any field of leadership in the Christian ministry, whether in pastoral ministry or in theological research and teaching.

Through the participation of *The Evangelical-Lutheran Theological University* in Budapest, Hungary, the rich experiences of churches and communities in the rapidly changing situation of the former Eastern Bloc countries in Europe are brought into the Network co-operation. *The Evangelical-Lutheran Theological University* offers a five year program of theological studies concluding with a university diploma. Although it does not presently offer a Master Program and its classes are given in Hungarian, this University will work towards meeting the challenges posed by full participation in the Network activities. This means that it will offer at least some courses in English, and facilitate in other ways the reception in Budapest of students and teachers from the other Network institutions.

In Oslo, Norway, *The Faculty of Theology*, University of Oslo will participate in the Network jointly with *The Seminary of Practical Theology*, University of Oslo and *Diakonhjemmet College*, Oslo. All three of them are experienced institutions in the fields of theological and diaconal education. From 1998, they will co-operate closely on the establishment of a Master Program in contextual theology offered at *The Faculty of Theology*, University of Oslo. This "Master of Philosophy in Contextual Theology" is a specialized program where the emphasis is on a methodological and hermeneutical approach to different theological, social and cultural contexts.

**Coordinating institution (1998-2001):**

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## NETWORKING IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

### *Response by participants*

In a plenary discussion, participants responded to the presentation and raised additional issues. The overall theme for the discussion revolved around the question: *what makes a network "work?"* The following is a summary of comments and questions.

- This initial effort to establish a functioning network of Lutheran theological institutions is commendable, and helps the institutions, churches and LWF to explore related practical and theoretical issues.
- It was acknowledged that the development of ecumenical networks will introduce additional issues - both difficulties and possibilities.
- How are institutions selected for inclusion in such a network? What are the criteria and how are criteria established?
- How does a global network relate to national or regional associations of theological schools?
- What are the challenges and dangers associated with a network that is too narrow or too broad?
- What are the dynamics and relationships (practical, theoretical and theological) among education, contextualization, globalization and networking?
- When providing online courses, how is the ministry context identified and acknowledged?
- For online courses, what kind of relational context is created by the online medium?
- When students seek out "the best" institution, how are differences in teaching and resource contexts addressed?
- In curriculum planning within a network, what are the challenges, difficulties and implications?



- How are the challenges of contextual relevance addressed, for example, when students exchange between western and southern institutions?

It was noted that such networks in theological education are emerging in the context of globalization that includes rapid technological change, and dramatic ongoing changes in distance relationships. In this context, such a formalized network offers a different way to travel, and a different form of pilgrimage.

*LWF Global Consultation on Theological Education*  
*August 23 to 27, 1999, Rome, Italy*  
*Revisioning Theological Education*

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FEMINIST THEOLOGY:  
RETHINKING OF THEOLOGICAL  
EDUCATION



*LWF Global Consultation on Theological Education*  
*August 23 to 27, 1999, Rome, Italy*

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*Dr. Ulrike Wagner-Rau*  
*"Feminist, Liberating Theology"*



*Dr. Ulrike Wagner-Rau, Rev. Dr. Faith Rohrbough, Rev. Dr. Wanda Deifelt*  
*"Women's Presence in Theological Education"*



## FEMINIST THEOLOGY: RETHINKING OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

*Dr. Wanda Deifelt*

The correlation between feminist theology and theological education is not new for those who have walked the path of theological education, taking into account the specificity of human experiences – as it is marked by culture, gender, race and class – in our task of theologizing. Neither is it new for those who have been in tune with some of the contemporary themes within theological studies, when feminist theology was named - as it perhaps continues to be named in many institutions - as women's issues in theology or religion.

Most of us started to discuss the specific aspect of women within theological education realizing, first of all, women's absence both from the classrooms as well as from the curriculum. Women did not appear. In a report submitted by the World Conference of Associations of Theological Institutions in 1997, the status of women in theological education is thus stated: "Women are disadvantaged: in the daily administration of theological institutions; in male models of ministerial formation; in the syllabus based upon a male biblical and theological canon; in having to deal with predominantly male faculty role models and a male 'unwritten syllabus' shaping institutional community life; and in institutions where a *token* female presence simply maintains the *status quo*."<sup>1</sup>

### **Women's presence in theological education**

The entrance of women to study at any seminary or theological college is always remembered as an historical event. At Protestant seminaries, and at Lutheran theological schools in particular, the first women who dared to enter the limited field of theology are still recalled as pioneers. To show the importance of these first women in theological education and praxis, one need only go through the list of topics chosen for student term papers, master's theses or doctoral dissertations at our institutions, which attempt to recover the path walked by the first female theological students, women pastors, deaconesses, or lay preachers.

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<sup>1</sup> "Women in Theological Education," abstract of pre-congress paper, *WOCATI News* 7 (March 1997): p. 16.



This type of research reveals, for instance, the difficulties encountered by the women who walked the corridors of our seminaries as students. At our own seminary, in São Leopoldo, Brazil, the first woman to start her theological studies was Eve Wysk in 1952, but she and several others who entered seminary did not graduate. Only Elisabeth Dietschi, who started her studies in 1966 and graduated in 1970, completed her studies and was able to work as a pastor (but in Germany, not in Brazil). Since that time, in the 1970s, the admission of women for theological training has become more and more accepted - with a few exceptions - but this would never have been possible without the efforts of previous generations.

Indeed, in the past decades we have slowly experienced a shift in the place of women in theology. From being mere spectators in liturgy, women are nowadays officiating; from listeners to sermons, women are now preaching; from being completely absent from the classrooms at Lutheran seminaries, women became students and are, although still rather scarce, also theological educators. This move, however, did not happen from one day to the next. Rather, this shift reveals a long-standing tradition of struggle and commitment, a struggle that affected local congregations, church leadership and theological institutions.

Also within the Lutheran World Federation the issue of women in theological education has been widely stressed. The Third World Lutheran Theological Educators Conference, in São Leopoldo, Brazil, September 5-11, 1988, produced a small document entitled "*Letter Regarding Women and Theology*." That letter emphasized two main points: first, women's need for theological education and second, women's ordination. The theme of that conference had been "*Rethinking Luther's Theology in the Context of the Third World*," and women's issues, although not part of the official panels, entered though the back door and became a very hot topic. Let me share with you this letter:

We have met as educators concerned with the reinterpretation of the Lutheran heritage from the perspective of the Third World and within the context of the Third World.

We want to affirm that just as societies with individual and social rights include the right of women to an education, we urge the leadership of our churches to encourage and facilitate the access of women to basic as well as higher education.

As theologians we are especially concerned with women's access to theological education and the support available to women from our churches and the communities of their studies.

We pledge to work for an increase in the number of women in theology - students as well as educators - responsible for theological training.

We believe that the ordination of women is needed, just as is a theologically sound reinterpretation of Scripture. The Lutheran tradition, particularly the Lutheran understanding of justification by grace through faith, and the universal priesthood of



all baptized believers should lead to fuller human community. Therefore we pledge to work for the ordination of women in our churches and in all the Lutheran churches.<sup>2</sup>

Following the letter are the signatures of all participants, except one who did not agree that women's ordination had any biblical grounding.

If women's presence in Lutheran seminaries was astounding 30 years ago, this is no longer a reason for surprise nowadays. The past decades have witnessed a tremendous shift, also regarding the mentality of church members over issues such as women's ordination, women's leadership in local congregations and women's presence in seminaries as theological educators. This shift was not accidental, but is part of a longer and greater movement, present all through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which women moved from the private into the public arena.

### **The legacy of our foremothers**

To think that the status that women have nowadays is a mere consequence of a more progressive and liberal mentality is to undermine the longstanding movement of women (and of men in solidarity with women) to achieve a more egalitarian position in church and society. It is true that women on other continents have an even longer tradition of struggle for the recognition of women's dignity, but in Latin America this struggle really caught fire at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century within the secular women's movement. In this movement, very much in tune with the international suffragist ideals, women demanded the right to vote, to receive education and to hold property.

In Brazil, one example of such leadership already in the last century is an educator by the name of Nisia Floresta. Born in 1810, Nisia joined other women of her time in rehearsing the education of women. To show her conviction, she started a school for girls in Porto Alegre in 1833, and she alone taught all subjects, from Geography to Latin. Years later, having moved to Rio de Janeiro, she started a similar school, and there she spent another 17 years. In a time when few women dared to dream about education for women, Nisia already put it into practice. For us who dwell in the field of theology, it is amazing where the secular women's movement sought its arguments for women's equality: from the Bible. This is how Nisia stated it: "Deborah, Miriam, and Judith have already given proof that the grace of God has touched them, allowing them to reveal some of their mysteries with humanity. With clear minds and rare courage, they prove that women are no longer destined solely to tend the

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<sup>2</sup> Nelson Kirst, ed. *Rethinking Luther's Theology in the Context of the Third World*. Third World Lutheran Theological Educators Conference, São Leopoldo, Brazil, 5-11 September 1988, p. 148.



flock, to prepare food, and guarantee the continuity of the human species.”<sup>3</sup>

With some regret, it is necessary to recognize that, in the secular setting, women have had more chances to advance, both in terms of education, leadership positions, and recognition of full personhood, than in the religious setting. In terms of women's rights in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, society at large picked up more quickly than the churches on the liberal views of women's potential and contribution for the development of society. Most churches, in the last century and in the present one, even used the power of the ecclesiastical institution to prevent women from achieving such rights, with exceptions well noted and celebrated, of course. The first attempt to establish a women's committee to interpret the Bible, headed by Elisabeth Cady Stanton in the United States in 19<sup>th</sup> century, was met with great skepticism. But against all odds, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and others edited *The Woman's Bible* in two volumes, which appeared in 1895 and 1898. In their commentaries, the female interpreters pointed out: “(1) The Bible is not a ‘neutral’ book, but a political weapon against women's struggle for liberation. (2) This is so because the Bible bears the imprint of men who never saw or talked with God.”<sup>4</sup>

Having heard time and time again that the Bible enforced women in their “divinely” ordained place - a place of submission and subordination – Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and many others decided to see for themselves what the Bible really said about women. Besides enforcing women's rights in speeches, writing letters to newspapers, petitioning legislators, and protesting to courts, it was also necessary to rebuke the clergy for insisting, through the use of Scriptures, that woman was only the rib of man and had no condition to walk with her own feet. It is not surprising, therefore, that *The Woman's Bible* was received with some sour comments, to which Elizabeth Cady Stanton did not fear to reply in the same tone:

Another clergyman says: “It is the work of women, and the devil.” This is a grave mistake. His Satanic Majesty was not invited to join the Revising Committee, which consists of women alone. Moreover, he has been so busy of late years attending Synods, General Assemblies and Conferences, to prevent the recognition of women delegates, that he has no time to study the languages and “higher criticism.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Nisia Floresta, *Opúsculo Humanitário* (São Paulo: Cortez, 1989), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroads, 1984), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Revising Committee, *The Woman's Bible*, Part 2 (Seattle: Coalition Task Force on Women and Religion, 1974), pp. 7-8.



Stanton had a broad view of how to overcome women's oppression. The fact that the church rested on the shoulders of women, but women could not decide the courses the church should take, was one of the many patterns of oppression that had to be questioned. Women's theological bondage played an ideological role in keeping them submissive, and only the naked truth would startle women out of their sanctimonious attitude toward the Bible and the church. The church was one element more and, perhaps, the most powerful since it had "God's Word" to maintain women in a subservient position. Therefore, the hierarchical church too had to be challenged and brought to the level of the other institutions that fought against women's emancipation. However, *The Woman's Bible* was not an attack on religion per se, but on false teachings about women, based on religion. This is shown in one of Stanton's quotes:

There are some general principles in the holy books of all religions that teach love, charity, liberty, justice and equality for all the human family, there are many grand and beautiful passages, the golden rule has been echoed and re-echoed around the world. There are lofty examples of good and true men and women, all worthy our acceptance and imitation whose luster cannot be dimmed by the false sentiments and vicious characters bound up in the same volume.<sup>6</sup>

The fact that women have access to theological discussion, results, nowadays, in questions regarding the mode of research and the uses made of these findings. Only when women are capable of reading the biblical texts, and then reclaim the tradition present, is it possible to critically evaluate the teachings they presented about women. But this work is not only done in order to deconstruct. It also had the purpose to build new knowledge, now based on a broader scope, attempting to integrate and affirm the full potential not only of women, but of the whole of human creation.

The ideas that women like Nisia Floresta and Elizabeth Cady Stanton posed so well in the last century are fully experienced by women and men in Latin America nowadays. There is something powerful, challenging, and life-affirming when people can read the Bible with their own eyes and discover meaning in it. This is truly a learning experience. Many women who read the Bible feel like that woman, in one of Jesus' parables, who sweeps the whole house looking for a lost coin. Today women continue to sweep the Bible looking for the lost treasure of women's memories. When such a coin (memory) is found, it needs to be shared with other people, and there is great celebration.

The positive result of women doing such research is that of reconstruction. Looking for the presence of women in history, in tradition, in past documents and in whichever source is available, has brought forth a new dimension: the recognition of women as historical beings,

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<sup>6</sup> Stanton, *The Woman's Bible*, Part 1, pp. 12-13.



whose deeds (although not always registered) are part of our common history. In terms of church history, this has engendered a new sense of belonging among women. As women, we recognize that this is our common heritage, that we are part of it. Women are not uninvited guests who crash a party, sneaking in through the back door. The church, founded on the liberating message of Jesus Christ, is taken to heart by women, who feel that this is our sacred space as well.

### **Ordination and Education**

Many documents dealing with the access of women to theological education deal with the issue of ordination. In my opinion, it is important to distinguish these two aspects. Not all theological education needs to lead, necessarily, to ordination. But the argument of ordination (or the refusal to ordain) should not prevent women from access to theological formation. The access of women to a sound, well-based theological education has been denied on the basis that women will not need such an education; it would be a waste of time and resources. Coincidentally, these were the same words used to refuse education to women in the secular setting, when it used to be said that women would not make good use of the knowledge given to them. After all, they could only be housewives and mothers, and for that, no schooling was needed.

Ordination cannot be confused with women's rights. Ordination is a call to a special form of ministry, and it relies on vocation. Only God has the right to choose people for specific forms of ministry. But ordination becomes an issue of rights and justice when somebody feels called to exercise a form of ministry and is barred from it on the basis of cultural, political, economic, or gender bias. Also, the connection of theological education with the issue of ordination has to do, in many cases, with a hierarchical view of church, in which only pastors are entitled to have a formal theological formation. Nothing is further from Luther's proposal, in which children and parents alike should be well prepared in the issues of faith. Our churches tend to use the "trickle down" principle when it comes to theological education, based on the false premise that well-educated pastors will lead to well-educated members in the congregations. We have given much less emphasis to continuing education of lay members, catechists, deacons and deaconesses than we have given to pastors. That is why theological education and ordination need to be addressed separately. To what extent does our emphasis on theological education (or lack of it) also reflect a hierarchical concept of church - in true conflict with the notion of the priesthood of all believers?

My assumption is that education is a *right* - for women and for men. Also, theological education is a right. Women are entitled to receive both access to information and the conditions to develop their full intellectual potential. In this sense, our theological institutions have moved a long way, but there still is plenty of space to grow. A survey undertaken by the Theological Education Desk of the EMW (*Evangelisches Missionswerk*) in 1994, under the



heading "Women and Theological Education in Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean," showed the slow increase and presence of women within formal theological education (among EMW's partner institutions).<sup>7</sup>

In Africa, the survey pointed out that the percentage of women students is low, but it rose from 2% to 11% during the period between 1986 and 1994. Women on the teaching staff are very few. Although the survey does not give the numbers, the comment made was that the number "has stagnated and a significant increase cannot be expected in the near future."<sup>8</sup>

In Latin America, the percentage of women students is one third, but there are 8% fewer women on the teaching staff than among the students. In general terms, female lecturers and professors form 22% of the teaching body, but the survey does not specify in which areas the women are actually teaching. From experience I should suspect that very few of those among the 22% are actually theological professors. Rather, they would assume a position in those areas considered to be auxiliary (secondary) to theology, such as languages, music, etc.

In Asia, the percentage of women students was 17% in 1994, having risen from 11% in 1987. The percentage of women on the teaching staff is the same as that of women among the students.

On the three continents, the increase of women in formal theological education was well-noticed. Part of the credit for this was attributed to the "Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women," which promoted the possibility of women exercising leadership, made discrimination against women more visible and denounced it publicly, and boosted women's access to information (also about the possibilities for theological formation). Still, at the end of the Decade, the access of women to education was strongly emphasized. The Platform for Action of the Lutheran World Federation Consultation on Women, in 1995, reiterated this.

Education is one of the most important means to empower women with the knowledge, positive attitudes, values and skills necessary to develop critical thinking, assertiveness, self-confidence and full partnership in society. Education is multi-dimensional and complex and runs a thread through every aspect of a person's life and

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<sup>7</sup> Lothar Engel and Maureen Trott, "Women in Theological Education in Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean," (a study on partner institutions carried out on behalf of the *Evangelisches Missionswerk* Theological Education Desk, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 3.



development. The areas of need for the education of women include leadership, education for life and advocacy education.<sup>9</sup>

### **Feminist theology is more than women's theology**

Letty Russel once described theological education as exodus. Theological education, she writes, "is a journey toward freedom: a journey with others, for others, towards God's future."<sup>10</sup> The presence of women in theological education will necessarily change the outlook of theology as it is taught and lived out at our theological institutions. Therefore, "education as exodus could be described as a process of becoming to critical and committed awareness of ourselves and the world in the light of God's intended purpose for New Creation."<sup>11</sup> Women's presence in theological education has shifted the questions, presented a different outlook for theology and envisioned new relationships, based on partnership between men and women.

One of the questions raised by feminist theology toward any production of knowledge concerns the value-free, neutral standpoint that academic studies pretend to have, but which, in fact, veils the presuppositions and biases of the scholars. The recognition that men and women write, study, and theorize from different perspectives - based on their experiences and background - is not a finding of female scholars. Heidegger, Gadamer, and other philosophers have discovered that beforehand. But the recognition that our theologizing is done out of our context, in tune with the questions raised by our times, and that the answers given are only provisional, is a factor taken to heart by many female scholars and theologians. This is a common thread in the publications of Ivone Gebara, Elsa Tamez, Ana Maria Tepedino (the names of some feminist scholars in Latin America) and by liberation theologians even before that.<sup>12</sup>

This new approach to theologizing also requires a new methodology with its own name. The creation of such a theology, which originates with the reflection of women upon our own historical location, the roots of our oppression and the keys for our liberation, is baptized with

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<sup>9</sup> Dorothy Marple and Musimbi Kanyoro, eds., *We Are Witnesses* (Geneva: LWF Documentation 39, March 1996), p. 63.

<sup>10</sup> Letty M. Russell, "Education as Exodus," *Mid-Stream* Vol. XIX No. 1 (January, 1980): p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>12</sup> As an example of how feminist theology influences the discussions in theological education, see the special issue of *Educación* 23 (Noviembre 1995): pp. 1-28.

different names in different parts of the globe. By some of us it is called feminist theology, by others it is named womanist, mujerista, etc. All of these theologies agree that we need to speak God's language in our own tongues. We can only speak the verb of God in our dialects (paraphrasing bishop Dom Pedro Casaldaliga), and that is why our theologies are partial. None of our attempts will be able to translate the fullness of God in human terms, but we can establish bridges between the human and the divine, affirming the closeness of God in human affairs.

In Latin America, the term feminist theology was formally adopted in December 1993, at the regional conference of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT).<sup>13</sup> At that conference, we consciously decided to name the theology we were doing as feminist because, in our understanding and according to standard Portuguese definition, feminism is a movement that seeks equal rights between women and men. Feminism is, therefore, a broader term than saying women's theology (*teologia da mulher*), the terminology employed by theologians in the 1980s. Feminist theology can also be done by men. Even if it starts with the experience of women, its scope broadens once it analyzes sexism, racism, classism, militarism, and globalism.

Feminist theology in Latin America is characterized by the theory and praxis model, inherited from liberation theology. In 1994, at a consultation held in Costa Rica, a representative group of Latin American female theological educators stressed the need to strengthen attention to gender issues in our theological schools. The emphasis of the consultation was on hermeneutics, and how a feminist perspective brings a challenge to the paradigms already known. Women's issues are easily set at the fringe of the curriculum as a specific subject that is of interest to women only. Based on this, we realized that the challenge was to mainstream women's studies, gender issues and feminist theology, so that it could impact the whole of theological education.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, male and female students would be challenged to revise the cultural and religious arguments that prevent women and men from partnership and be enabled to engage in liberating praxis.

### **The creation of a chair of feminist theology**

In an almost visionary proposal, students at Escola Superior de Teologia, in São Leopoldo, met during 5 years in a committee called *Pró-Teóloga* (for the hiring of a female theologian).

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<sup>13</sup> Ana Maria Tepedino and Maria Pilar Aquino, eds., *Entre la Indignación y la Esperanza* (Bogotá: Indo-American Press, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> Wanda Deifelt, "Teoría Feminista y Metodología Teológica," *Vida y Pensamiento* Vol. 14, No. 1 (June 1994): pp. 9-14.



From 1985-1990, the committee was able to invite several female theologians as visiting scholars, both from Brazil and other places in Latin America, to ensure that women's perspectives were represented. This process culminated with the creation of a Chair of Feminist Theology, in the years 1989-1990. The description of the chair was clear: to make women more visible in the curriculum, to teach and research feminist theology (as it was being elaborated in other parts of the world), to foster a greater awareness of women's reality to the students, and to keep a connection with the developments of the women's movement, both secular and religious, in the country. There was a common agreement for the need of such a teaching position, but, ironically, choosing a name for the chair turned out to be almost more difficult than the creation of the chair itself. In the process, students, faculty, women's groups at the local congregations, the seminary board and the church board became involved. The name "feminist theology" was adopted and I was hired for the position in 1990, starting to work in 1991.

I do not wish to focus on my personal experience of teaching, but on the grounds for choosing the term feminist theology as opposed to women's theology or feminine theology - the other options for naming the chair. The arguments against using the term women's theology was that, although women were addressed as objects of study, it could easily be confused with a theology about women, and not by women. However, even if such a theology were done solely by women, then it would fall into the same pattern of androcentric theology. Men would be excluded from this process in the same way as women had been in traditional theology. The option, women's theology, was eliminated. Another option was to adopt the wording, feminine theology, a term coined in the late 1980s by some Brazilian theologians, such as Margarida Brandão and Tereza Cavalcanti, who believed that women's contribution to the dryness and dullness of theology could be the so-called feminine/female values: passion, tenderness, affection, creativity, and the capacity to bring forth new life. The main argument against this choice was the stereotyping of women, falling into the trap of limiting women to one side of the brain.

One of the many achievements of the discussion regarding feminist theology at Escola Superior de Teologia in São Leopoldo, was the fact that the course of feminist theology became part of the standard curriculum, i.e., a class that needs to be attended by all students, male and female. In addition, as a course like others, it requires that students apply themselves to the studies, as there is an evaluation at the end of the semester. Throughout the past few years, I have noticed that male students seem to benefit greatly from the class, and even more those who like to sit at the back row, with arms crossed and an expression in between skeptical and cynical. Throughout the semester one can sense how their minds are opened by the information they receive. Because the students are exposed to topics otherwise uninteresting to them, they are constantly surprised. If left as an elective course, feminist theology would be of interest only to those already converted to the cause, and not to those who need it most.



A class in feminist theology differs both in content and format from other classes. First, the students are invited to think about their own life journeys, their faith experience, and how it relates to the social, cultural, political and economic setting in which they are inserted. There is a clear sense that the personal is political. Secondly, the students are also encouraged to reflect autonomously, in dialogue with a larger group, about their lives as women and men, in light of the information they receive from feminist theology.

A key to teaching feminist theology is to speak not only of women, but to address issues of gender.<sup>15</sup> Gender studies are important tools for feminist theology because they unveil the complexities of the learning experience in human development. From these studies we have realized that what defines a woman or a man, in any given society, is not only biological determination (sex), but the web of information that we receive even before birth, and which informs us about the appropriate/inappropriate manner or behavior of males and females within a particular group. The influences that we receive are very strong, but still, gender values can be questioned and changed.<sup>16</sup>

Feminist theology also requires an interdisciplinary approach. It is imperative to have an openness to work with colleagues from other fields and convince them to introduce feminist perspective into the subjects being taught in their classes. Otherwise, feminist theology will remain an exotic topic, to which students are exposed once or twice a week, but which has no relation whatsoever to the other areas. In addition, this is necessary in order not to overburden the professor who teaches feminist theology - she (or he) seen as the sole responsible person to deal with gender issues in biblical studies, church history, systematic theology, practical theology, counseling, etc.

We have been able to rehearse such an interdisciplinary approach more at the graduate than the undergraduate level. At the Ecumenical Institute (*Instituto Ecumênico de Pós-Graduação*) in São Leopoldo, we have established a research project in feminist theology, which provides the possibility for women and men to do a Masters or a Doctorate in feminist theology or in another area (Bible, Theology, History, Practical Theology) from a feminist perspective. This is possible through co-orientation. Some of the projects developed so far relate to the rescue of women's history within the Protestant churches, biblical hermeneutics, inter-religious dialogue, Christian education within the context of life narratives, ethics and sexuality.

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<sup>15</sup> Marcela Lagarde, *Género y Feminismo: Desarrollo Humano y Democracia* (Madrid: Horas Y Horas, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> Marlene Rozek, "Aprender/Não-aprender e Gênero," *Revista Psicopedagogia* 17, No. 45 (1998): p. 9.



## **Final Remarks**

To finalize, I should say that feminist theology also needs to go beyond the seminary walls, into the life of the congregations. One way this is done (in a small way) is with the preparation of future catechists, deacons, deaconesses and pastors, exposing them to some contemporary issues that affect the greater constituency of people with whom they will be working (i.e., women). From classroom into the congregation, students become more aware of issues such as domestic violence, sexual harassment and abuse, and discrimination on the job, and discover places where help can be sought. Students are encouraged to establish direct contact with organized groups within the church and outside, and to rehearse new ideas in theological education.

We want to affirm that theological education is not done in a vacuum; it always takes place in concrete social, political, and historical contexts. Global issues of social justice (or its lack), especially impact women and may prevent the effective participation of women in all settings of education. For women, therefore, the issue of social justice lies at the core of all theology. We need to recognize women's achievements *and* determine next steps for theological education.<sup>17</sup>

Feminist theology within the academic setting is both challenging and rewarding. It gives the opportunity to critically evaluate the theological curriculum, to present new proposals, to offer fresh insights to teaching and learning, to research new topics, and to be a part of the learning process of never ending discoveries, experienced by people who have their minds open for the newness of God's creation everyday.

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<sup>17</sup> "Women in Theological Education," Congress 96 Response, *WOCATI News* 7 (March 1997): p. 17.

## FEMINIST THEOLOGY: RETHINKING OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

*Dr. Ulrike Wagner-Rau*

### **Women as teachers of theology**

Women are public participants in theological dialogue, both as laypersons and as theologians. They are leading worship services. They are filling responsible positions in the church structures. They are studying theology in droves. Increasing numbers of them are becoming pastors. They are professional theological scholars and writers, and are involved in theological education. These are all results of processes in society which have far-reaching importance for the situation of women, and their possibilities to have influence in the church and in theology. For the first time in history, women are appearing in public in great numbers as doers of theology and of the churches' business - with all sorts of very real consequences for parish life and theological doctrine.

Nevertheless, I must hasten to add, the representation of women in theological research and teaching is far from being just and appropriate. (I call to your mind the Lutheran World Federation's decision to try to reach 40% participation by women.) Two statistics from the context of the German Federal Republic will illustrate this: only 4.3% of professors of theology are women, and the current reductions in the size of theological faculties will probably not improve the chances for women theologians. And, of 27 seminaries for pastors among the member churches of the Evangelical Church of Germany, only two have women as directors.

Now, one should not take for granted that increasing numbers of women teaching theology necessarily means a stronger impetus from feminist theology in theological education. Many women are not interested in feminist theological approaches, research on women or gender studies. And no woman should be limited, in her theological research and education, to these approaches. However, the reverse is true: without growing numbers of women working in theological education, feminist theological concepts will remain marginalized, a special area which fails to be integrated into the total spectrum of theological thought and teaching, and whose influence and further development remain limited by lack of material resources and contacts.



*My first point for theological education is therefore:* Theological education which wants to be open to feminist theology, and which wants to be challenged and changed by such theology, must support women theologians in qualifying for research and teaching positions. A great deal needs to be done when there are teaching positions to be filled, to increase the proportion of women as teachers of theology and to have their presence and position in theological education be seen as natural (which sociologists indicate occurs only when the proportion of women reaches at least 30%).

The call for women to have more equal rights and participation in theological education is based on biblical theological insights. Because women and men are equally made in the image of God, because the Spirit of God is bestowed upon them both in equal measure and they become members of the Body of Christ through the same baptism, it is an act in accordance with Christian principles to promote justice between women and men as far as humanly possible. The great importance of women in church life also calls for them to have an appropriate role in theological education and to offer their gifts there. And, last but not least, women have experience and perspectives to offer which can enrich theology and free it of its androcentrism.

Just participation of women is the precondition in order for concepts from the content of feminist thought to enter into theological education and to stimulate and change it. I now turn to these concepts.

### **Consideration of gender as a category**

The common thread which is basic to feminist research and teaching, despite the strong differences and extremely varied and sometimes even contentious approaches taken, is the consideration of gender as a category. That human beings are identified as women and men; how this identification comes about which determines one's whole life; and what consequences it has had and continues to have in all areas of social reality - these are of common interest for feminist studies and education. It determines subject matter and the formulation of questions. It directs feminist scholarly criticism. It has repercussions for the choice of methods.

This interest in giving consideration to the relationship between the sexes is fed by the recognition that, however this relationship is constituted in different historical, societal and cultural situations, it is always characterized by a lack of symmetry, which is both the expression and the cause of unjust conditions in society and as such represents an ethical challenge for action. Even where feminist thought has developed its theories to a high degree, its origin in the women's movement of the 1970's and 1980's is still clearly visible. This is also true of feminist theology. It arose from the insight that the so-called "women's issues" in the churches not only raise questions for the church structures, but in many ways are bound up with central themes and symbols of theology and of the Christian faith, and thus must be



treated theologically. Indeed, the asymmetrical relation between the sexes is also reflected in theological thinking and the life of the church, and is generated and supported by them.

In the past 25 years a great many topics and problems have been analyzed, considered, or at least stated by feminist theology. I can briefly mention a few here:

- In biblical theology the focus has broadened - from a concern with specifically women's topics to a feminist exegesis and hermeneutic of the entire biblical and early Christian tradition.
- In church history, feminist research is working to throw more light on repressed and submerged women's history and to open up previously disregarded sources within social and devotional history.
- In systematic theology, interest centres on the debates about the question of God and the symbols by which God is represented; about theological anthropology (especially the concepts of sin); and about Christology.
- In practical theology, most work is being done on issues of worship; on the understanding of ministry; on the reality for women in the ministry; on the relationship between the sexes in church structures; on taking feminist categories into consideration in pastoral ministry and religious education; etc.

Overall it may be remarked that the focus of interest has widened from topics specifically oriented toward the reality of women's lives to those which regard gender as a construct arising from the systemic interplay of the two sexes. In particular, it is disputed among feminist scholars to what extent making the distinction between the sexes actually reinforces that which it is intended to undo, namely the asymmetry of gender relationships. There are deconstructive approaches which seek to do away with the bipolar distinction between the sexes in favour of a multiplicity of distinctions. This is understandable as a reaction to the danger that emphasizing the difference between the two genders will lead back towards a determinism of feminine and masculine natures, and to the concern that the distinctions among women who are different from one another, and men who are different from one another, will be ignored. On the other hand, an emphasis on the difference between the sexes can claim to correspond better to the real imbalance of the relation between the sexes in society as it really is, with its negative effects on women's lives.

On the whole one can say, however - and this is *my second point for theological education* - that consideration of gender as a category, and the debate as to how this consideration can appropriately take place, are essentially in the feminist interest. The insights and formulations of problems from gender studies must be integrated into the content and methods of theological education. In addition, the fact that women *and* men are students of theology and



are teaching theology, must be taken into account in the reflections on both teaching and practice. The issues which arise must not be marginalized as "women's issues," as so often happens, but must be accepted as common issues for everyone. Men as well as women must recognize the limitations of their way of seeing things, which is shaped by the individual, social and symbolic determination of their gender, and thus the mutual dependence of each sex upon the other's way of seeing things. Only then can theology, through critical self-examination, end the continuation of the asymmetrical relation between the sexes through its specific ways of thinking, symbolizing and structuring church life. And only then can it serve a church whose mission commits it to justice and love.

### **Openness to individual religious experience and interpretation of life**

In Western societies, a dramatic structural transformation is taking place which is manifested in increasing pluralism, individualization, departures from tradition, etc. In this process, the churches find themselves in an ever more rapidly changing situation. As in the time of the early church, the Christian understanding of reality has to be asserted in the midst of a wide variety of religious offerings and interpretations of meaning. People no longer grow up to accept their own tradition and the guidance it offers as a matter of course, but rather must decide which religious interpretation proves most plausible and workable for their own lives. Christian theology is faced with the expectation that it will communicate itself effectively to the reality of people's lives. We are seeing everywhere the longing for meaning in an increasingly incomprehensible world, expressed as the search for a religion. The meaning of the Christian faith for people in the Western industrial nations will be proven not least of all by its ability to relate to this demand for meaning, to increase the individual's sense of certainty, and to provide helpful guidance for their lives in the face of contemporary problems.

Understanding people's life situations and their individual search for meaning as an integral part of theological thinking and church action is characteristic of feminist theology. The multitude of first-person life and faith stories from the early years of feminist theology bear witness that one of its roots is in taking women's experiences and religious ideas and, based on a feminist analysis of these experiences, interrogating theology and developing it further. From women's expressions of their experiences of suffering and being hurt in connection with church and theology, or of the strengthening and life-giving stimuli they have received from their Christian faith and church life, feminist theology has received a substantial part of its questions and inspirations. It is a theological approach in which the relation to the reality of people's lives, and the religious meaning which is found therein, has played an important part from the beginning. Of course, this also means that each such experience and interpretation is subject to criticism and correction by others' experience and by the biblical tradition. It must also be prepared for self-criticism and must guard against self-absolutism. In any case, from the feminist point of view, theology should not distance itself, with preconceived statements which are not open to criticism, from the lifelong religious experiences of women and men,



but must determine and express its subject matter in communication and in debate with these experiences.

Feminist theology and theological gender studies are theological approaches which are eminently related to experience. They show the capacity to be aware of, and to work with, the diverse realities of human lives. Thus they have a paradigmatic importance in meeting the theological challenge which comes from the structural transformation of Western societies. In keeping its ears open and its perceptions sharp for people's stories and questions, and in making room for them in its reflections, theological thought has something to learn from feminist theology.

The feminist theological discussion about worship may serve as an illustration of this. Worship very quickly became a central topic in feminist theology. Here the contents of the Christian faith are presented in a concentrated way and converted into the forms of celebration of worship. Form and content both came under feminist criticism after women became aware of the marginalization that they were experiencing in worship. They noticed that in the forms of language their presence at worship was being ignored. They realized that the wordiness of Protestant worship was too narrow for their religious sensibility, which also includes emotional and sensory experience. They criticized the limited participation of the congregation, which reflected the hierarchical structure of the churches. And they questioned the dominance and one-sidedness of the images of God which were being communicated. A great deal of women's theory and practice of worship, which they developed out of these criticisms, has entered into the general debate about worship and its practices. Much of it has in turn been criticized. In any case it can be said that feminist criticism of worship and new feminist designs for worship have changed the way worship is conducted in many places.

As it absorbs into its reflections the subjective experiences and the concrete reality of the lives of diverse persons, theology is changed. New subject matter, new questions, new designs and practices appear.

Thus *my third point for theological education* is this: the integration of feminist theological approaches contributes to the strengthening of theology's relationship to real life and to enabling students to find theological interpretations for the realities of diverse human lives. If many and diverse kinds of experience are brought into a reciprocal relationship with theology, not only will the interpretation of the experiences be changed, but there will also be repercussions for theology and church action.

### **A liberating theology, oriented towards justice issues**

Feminist theology, as I have already mentioned, is historically linked with the women's movement. Its essential impetus came, and still comes, from women's dedication to bringing



about more justice in the relationship between the sexes. Their own experience of oppression, violence and being undervalued has made women sensitive to the pain and sorrow of all people who suffer under oppression, and to the exploitation and destruction of the earth's resources. Not all feminist theologians see themselves explicitly as being in the liberation theology tradition. But for all of them the claim can be made that they treat the issue of justice not only as an issue of the inner life of persons, but as a concern for liberation from unjust structures, from unjust relationships, and from living conditions which reflect injustice and contradict God's love for all people and for the whole creation.

In taking this direction, feminist theology is in accord with other theological directions which are very definite about conducting their theological research and teaching with reference to their local context, and consciously reflect and include the social conditions and structures in their theological studies. At the turning point to the third millennium in the industrial nations, the gulfs are widening between poor and rich, between the powerful and the powerless, between those who have access to information technology and all that it makes possible and those who remain shut out from it. Ecological threats are increasing. The possibilities available through genetic engineering are growing at meteoric speed and with them the associated ethical and psychological problems. In the area of reproductive medicine and prenatal diagnosis, women are especially powerfully affected. Thousands of refugees and asylum seekers are challenging us to learn how people of differing cultures and religions can live together, and how to associate peacefully with foreigners. Within the churches, too, problems of just sharing of resources are intensifying as the funds available decrease. And just participation in the leadership structures of the church by women and men, laypersons and clergy, young and older persons, is on the way but still far from being realized.

In many areas, theology is being challenged to concern itself with contemporary problems and to prove itself fit for the future, insofar as it can clearly relate its tradition and the context of society to one another, and to make clear the truth and formative power of the Gospel for our social situation.

Hence *my fourth point for theological education*: to learn from feminist theology to conduct theological education in ways closely related to social reality and its problems. Students must become capable of analyzing the reality of their society, relating it to the liberating message of the Gospel, and developing for the church action plans which serve the cause of justice.

### **A spiritual theology**

Women do feminist theology, including that which is done within the academic establishment, in close connection with their spiritual practice. They ask one another about, and share, their religious experiences. They search the Christian tradition for forms and rituals with which to celebrate and illustrate their faith, and they invent new ones. They sing, dance, pray, meditate, fast, in order to open up spiritual sources for their lives. Feminist



theology is associated with an intensive and experimental devotional practice, and it pays close attention to this practice, without which theology loses its power.

The almost complete domination of academic theology and education by rationality, at least in Germany, is being questioned by feminist theology with its strong connection between spiritual practice and theological thought. Theological education must also be education in Christian spirituality, which is not always synonymous with churchly spirituality. My experience with students of both sexes is that they come to their training with a great longing for spiritual clarity and development, but are usually left hungry and disappointed in this regard. Teachers of theology often are not ready to be spiritual teachers for their students. In consequence, graduates in theology very often have a limited ability to speak in religious language and to plan and shape devotional exercises. They have difficulty in integrating their theological knowledge into their existential daily lives and practices. Thus they are also poorly prepared for their pastoral work in which they are supposed to accompany persons in their religious questioning and provide the formal settings for religious experience.

The religious longings among human beings in the Western industrial nations are very great. Wherever the possibility for spiritual experience seems to present itself, those providing it find people who take it up and who follow them, sometimes so uncritically that this becomes a problem. The churches too have the task of making themselves more clearly recognizable as places where a living and inviting spirituality may be found. Here they can learn from feminist theology and devotional practice, for women have discovered for themselves and have opened up spiritual sources from the history of Christianity and through ecumenical fellowship. They have also sought out contacts with non-Christian religions, to receive stimuli and inspiration from them. They have developed new forms of spirituality. Most of all, they have given a strong emphasis to the issue of devotional practice as an essential source for theological thought.

Hence *my fifth point for theological education*: Theological education can learn from feminist theology that it must always be spiritual education as well. The ability to speak the language and create the forms for expression of faith does not grow only out of rational consideration of theology, but rather must grow throughout the whole human being, through body, emotions and spirit. This also must be fostered by theological training, so that those who are so educated can themselves become teachers of theology in the true sense of the word.

### **Giving more attention to human relationships**

*My sixth and last point for theological education* is the following: As a growing number of women become integrated into theological teaching staffs, the level of human relationships is receiving a greater emphasis in the educational program. This proposition brings me back to where I began these reflections.



I am aware that I am on slippery terrain here. In the background is the saying that relationships are more important to women and that they often have more competence in relational problems than do men. But this statement should be questioned critically from several points of view:

1. It is a statement which is certainly not always true. There are men who have a great capacity for relationships, and women who have very little capacity in this area.
2. It is a statement which in its essence is capable of being misunderstood, as if women were by nature more able to relate to others and care for them, instead of pointing to the extent which the relational ability of women represents a construct of our society and the result of many and various interlinking conditions.
3. It is a statement which threatens to entrench exactly that which, from a feminist point of view, should be dis-established: that, because of gender, women are supposed to have the relational competence and men the rational competence.

Despite these *justified* objections, I should like to let the statement stand, because I am convinced that at the present time there are ample grounds for it in the reality of relationships between the sexes in the Western world. This is demonstrated by daily experience as well as numerous empirical studies.

Thus I maintain that increasing numbers of women among teachers of theology will give the issue of relationships a greater, and productive, importance in the educational program, in various ways:

- As an addition to the concentration on imparting rational competence in the subject matter, paying attention to accompanying and supporting the students in their life journeys, at a human level, will gain more importance.
- Teaching and study towards a more supportive teaching methodology, which does justice to human beings, will be given more weight in addition to the research program.
- Relationships among members of teaching staffs themselves will change and become more clearly visible, in their opportunities and conflicts, and it will become possible to work on them. Cooperation and interdisciplinary efforts will be strengthened.
- The increased attention to the level of relationships will also promote the students' own relational capacities, which they will urgently need in their pastoral work.

## **Conclusion**

It is not my conviction that women have a better theological education to offer than men. Rather, it is my hope that the integration of women and of the various feminist theological approaches into the educational program will broaden and enrich theological education in these ways:

- more connection between theological questioning and thinking, and the various life realities of human beings, including the conditions in which they live;
- more bringing together and reciprocal stimulation between Christian spirituality, theological thought and Gospel-inspired action;
- more human relatedness and sociability in the educational process itself.

Whether or not these things really happen will be shown by theological education of the future, where women and men share equally in responsibility for it. To promote such an educational program seems to me to be one of the essential tasks of the coming years.

## **APPENDIX**

*Summary of the six points for theological education:*

1. Theological education which wants to be open to feminist theology, and which wants to be challenged and changed by such theology, must support women theologians in qualifying for research and teaching positions.
2. Consideration of gender as a category, and the debate as to how this consideration can appropriately take place, are essentially in the feminist interest. The issues which arise must not be marginalized as "women's issues," as so often happens, but must be accepted as common issues for everyone.
3. The integration of feminist theological approaches contributes to the strengthening of theology's relationship to real life and to enabling students to find theological interpretations for the realities of diverse human lives.
4. Theological education can learn from feminist theology to conduct theological education in ways closely related to social reality and its problems.
5. Theological education can learn from feminist theology that it must always be spiritual education as well.



6. As a growing number of women become integrated into theological teaching staffs, the issue of relationships is receiving a greater, and productive, emphasis in the educational program.

## FEMINIST THEOLOGY: RETHINKING OF THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

### *Response by participants*

Participants met in plenary and also in groups to discuss the two presentations. The following is a summary of comments, questions and suggestions.

#### GENERAL THEMES

Within the Lutheran communion, there is a wide variety of experience with respect to the pace of change, cultural expressions and theological traditions relating to the general issue of feminist theology and the role of women in the church. There was agreement that neglect of women's concerns and insights in theological issues signifies unfaithful stewardship on the part of the Church.

#### **Assessment of the situation regarding ordination of women**

There is a wide spectrum of practice among member churches regarding the ordination of women. For some churches, women's ordination is the long-established and accepted practice. Some churches accept women's ordination in principle but have encountered barriers in implementing the practice. Still other churches have not made decisions in favour of women's ordination.

Concern was expressed regarding realistic opportunities for call and service in churches where women have been ordained. This certainly applies to first calls, but also to subsequent calls and the opportunity to serve in what might be called senior positions. There was also concern for equitable opportunities for women to serve in churches where fewer full time ordained ministry positions may be available.

#### **Political barriers**

Participants also discussed what were termed "political barriers" to women's full participation in the church. For example, within a church there may be approval for women's ordination, but constitutional provisions that only congregations can ordain candidates. There may not be enough commitment or courage within an individual congregation to be the first to call and ordain a woman. Changing the constitution to authorize ordination by the national church could enable the church to act on its commitments with broader courage and support. Another example of "political barriers" is the pattern of sending or calling women to difficult



congregations or non-congregational ministries, such that the collage of images of women in ordained ministry does not include many positive congregational ministries.

### **Participation of women in theological institutions**

There is a perceived lack of female presence in theological institutions, even among those churches where women are ordained to the ministry of word and sacrament. The presence of female students in theological training varies from a reported high of 66% of the student population to none. There is also a progressive decline in women's representation as specialization continues, with very few women obtaining advanced theological degrees.

### **Curriculum issues**

It was acknowledged that feminist theology necessarily includes aspects of feminist insights, perspectives, values and practices. This is important to remember when local conditions generate suspicion of feminist theology as an exclusivist or isolated theological discipline. Examples of including feminist theology while keeping these concerns in mind include topics such as: "the biblical view of man and woman;" "theology and gender;" or the use of insights from feminist theology in biblical studies.

Concern was also expressed to engage people "where they are" in relation to feminist perspectives, and not to expect a hierarchical or organizational imposition of expectations or standards. It was felt that the Spirit must be given place to work, and stories were shared about transformation within such space. Sometimes students and faculty who initially resist the study of feminist values become the most appreciative of the experience. Social and cultural contexts may also influence initial responses to feminist theology. For example, the Asian working framework of "harmony" suggests the need to consider reconciliation while at the same time facing the challenges and change that feminist theology and perspectives present.

The long-term goal is to integrate feminist issues into the general curriculum, while in the short term it seems better to have them as separate sections of the curriculum. In some programs feminist theology is part of systematic theology, but it is often treated as an appendix to a course already in existence. In other programs it may be integrated into the curriculum, may be part of the undergraduate curriculum only, or at times may be offered as an elective.

However, it was noted that in some institutions students do not take an elective course in feminist theology for fear of negative reaction or even reprisals. In other programs, feminist theology has meant a re-assessment of the curriculum with the goal of better incorporating feminist values and concerns into all courses, for example addressing issues of God language, spirituality and domestic violence.

## **Survey of current realities and experiences**

Participants in this group provided anecdotal reports with their individual assessments of the teaching of feminist perspectives, and women's participation in theological education and ministry. The reports present a collage of women in theological education and ministry around the world.

*Canada* - Feminist theology is part of systematic theology, but is often treated as merely an addition to an already structured course. Systemic issues remain. It seems to be a surprise that women pastors have continued to be women after they are ordained. There are very few women faculty, and little church-wide attention has been given to promote development of women teaching theologians.

*Papua New Guinea* - There are no female students or faculty. The challenge is to find creative ways to incorporate feminist theology into programs, with an emphasis on rediscovering God's original intention for all creation.

*Cameroon* - The challenge for seminaries is to bring in new ideas to a very traditional way of doing theology. Topics such as feminist theology are considered to be an imposition of western ideas on Africans.

*Hong Kong* - Courses in feminist theology are offered as electives. Many Chinese women are reluctant to enroll for fear of negative reactions from spouses or male friends.

*Bolivia* - In the local context where feminist theology has a negative connotation, it was decided to offer courses in "theology and gender" instead of "feminist theology." The course in theology and gender is a required course.

*Estonia* - In this setting where both women and men are trained for ministry, feminist theology is not treated as a separate subject but is integrated in the curriculum.

*Rome* - In the Roman Catholic Church, feminist theology is not treated as a separate topic, but some feminist issues may be treated as specific courses. More women are now seriously studying theology and finding ways to make creative contributions to the church - as qualified lay women and not as ordained ministers.

*Tanzania* - There are difficulties for women theologians and pastors to gain acceptance after seminary graduation.

*France* - Women are accepted in pastorates, but acceptance of women on faculty has been a slower process. For example, when new books for review by faculty deal with feminist issues, invariably they are directed to women faculty. It is also generally expected that only women need to deal with issues of juggling faculty responsibilities with family life.



*Ethiopia* - Ordination of women is not addressed as part of the curriculum. It was agreed to approve the ordination of women after debate in the church between 1980 and 1997. The issue now is preparing congregations to accept women as pastors in a cultural setting that generally debases women. How can seminaries facilitate acceptance of women as pastors in the church?

*Japan* - Following a twenty-year period without women's ordinations after the first woman was ordained before 1970, women are again being ordained in the last five years. A course called "Biblical View of Men and Women" has been more positively accepted than a course called "Feminist Theology." Is the church ahead of society on these issues? The response is, "Not much, but it should be."

*Jamaica* - Great diversity across a wide spectrum is also observed in the Caribbean. For example, women can be ordained in the church in Surinam but not in other Lutheran churches in the Caribbean. Since  $\frac{3}{4}$  of university graduates in Jamaica are women, there is a tendency to talk about the marginalization of men. With this diversity of local culture and experience, it is important to see that different places need to operate on different timetables in addressing these issues.

*United States* - The younger generation of women believe that "the battle has been won," and are shocked to discover this is not so when they enter the parish. There is a need to integrate feminist theology and perspectives into the entire curriculum, but perhaps it is not the time to eliminate separate classes.

*India* - There is still need for feminist studies distinct from gender studies. Women come for theological education, but generally do not continue for advanced studies. There is benefit from secular women's studies that examine women in society, law, economic, etc.

*Norway* - A question was raised whether a separate emphasis on feminist theology might produce a fragmented perspective. Since building on the basics is still critical, one approach would be to select a few main feminist texts which deal with classical themes.

*Malaysia* - Feminist theology is seen negatively as a western import. There are efforts to collect resource books in local languages. Although 30% of the faculty are women, none have specific qualifications to teach feminist theology. Ordination of women is no longer an issue in Malaysia; full participation is accepted and women are encouraged to progress.

*Slovak Republic* - Thirty percent of ordained ministers are women. The church is moving closer to the time when there will be enough pastors to serve the church. Some wonder how that situation will affect the availability of calls and opportunities for women to serve.

## BURNING ISSUES

Several burning issues were identified, phrased in terms of provocative questions.

- How to incorporate feminist theology into current programs in seminaries where there are no female students or professors.
- How to incorporate feminist theology into current programs in seminaries where feminism is perceived as Western and thus foreign and negative.
- Is the practice and discipline of thinking universal, in the sense of being identical processes for both genders?
- Do women's ways of thinking and knowing need to be highlighted because of an imbalance up to now?
- Does feminist theology imply a different approach to theology or does it seek to correct or critique current theological methods?
- How can feminist theology help the effort to change or reform structures and systems?
- How does one evaluate change? And how long should one wait to evaluate results?

## KEY CHALLENGES AND INSIGHTS FOR SEMINARIES AND UNIVERSITIES

- Ensure that theological educational opportunities are made available to women whether seeking ordination or not. Whether or not ordination of women is practiced in a particular church, there must be a serious effort to provide theological education for women so that they can justifiably make essential and creative contributions to the church.
- Educate qualified men and women so that they can effectively teach feminist theology.
- Apprehension on the part of men to teach feminist theology was recognized. Co-teaching feminist theology is suggested as a possibility, since these are not issues only for women, but are issues for the church.
- Both women and men need to become more vocal with regard to women's issues and feminist theology.
- The writings of qualified feminist theologians should be made available in seminary libraries. It is of particular importance that feminist theologians be recognized in their own countries.
- The relationship between feminist theological education and spirituality needs to be explored more deeply.
- Include issues of gender and feminist theology in interviews for teaching and ministry positions.
- Ensure that bibliographies and resources in feminist theology be made available to faculty members.



## SUGGESTIONS

The conversations around this topic produced suggestions that were not formalized as recommendations by the consultation, but nonetheless are worthy of further consideration.

### *Churches are encouraged ...*

- to review church constitutions and bylaws to identify and change provisions which hinder both the theory and the practice of full participation of women in ordained ministry and in theological institutions
- to engage church leadership more strongly in seeking ways to ensure that qualified women are accepted as leaders in ministry at the congregational level (e.g. as women clergy)
- to express in practical ways that theological education involves much more than preparation for ordination
- to include issues of gender in youth work

### *Churches and theological institutions are encouraged ...*

- to broaden the discussion of gender issues and make it more interdisciplinary
- to have the courage to ask ourselves what mistakes we have made in the past

### *The Lutheran World Federation is encouraged ...*

- to invite member churches to emphasize issues of gender and theology (including feminist theology)
- to provide some helpful resources

*LWF Global Consultation on Theological Education*  
*August 23 to 27, 1999, Rome, Italy*  
*Revisioning Theological Education*

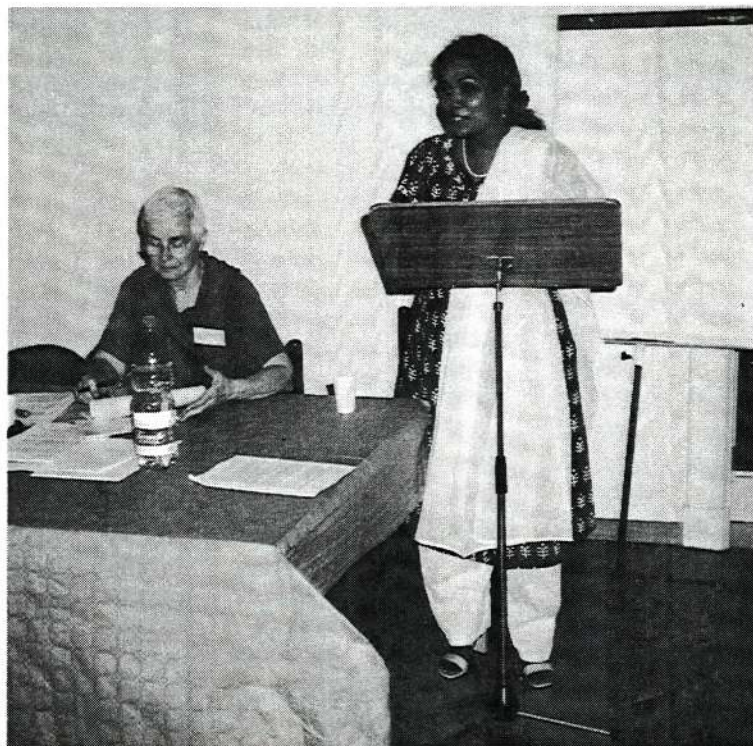
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THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION:  
A TOOL FOR TRANSFORMATION

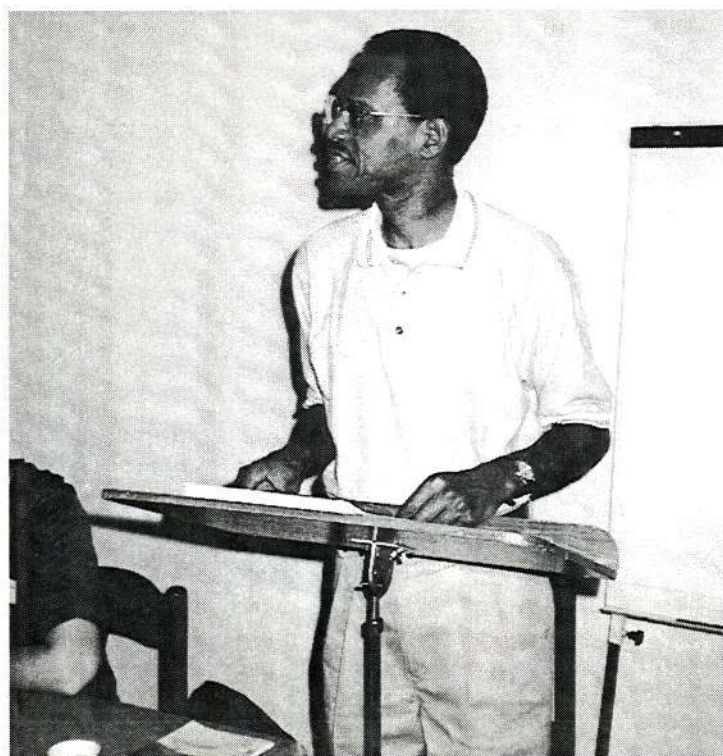


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*Dr. Monica Melanchthon*  
*"Faith Seeking Understanding"*



*Rev. Dr. James Echols*  
*"The Transforming Gospel"*

## THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION: A TOOL FOR TRANSFORMATION

*Dr. Monica J. Melanchthon*

That a relevant theology must be integrated with the life of the community is a principle upon which much of my theological training is based. There has been no question whatsoever in my mind that the aim of theological education is to enable the individual to work for the transformation of the society or community in which he or she has been placed. The Gurukul Lutheran Theological College, where I currently work, conceives of theological education,

as the power to understanding and realization of the Gospel in our total context, particularly the context of the marginalized. Theological education is a means to transform the total person in order to equip him or her to become an agent of change in terms of the Gospel. It is that which enables the transformation and liberation of the whole society.<sup>1</sup>

That theological education is meant to pass on the values, traditions and visions of a new society in order that people may live the Gospel in solidarity with those struggling for humanhood is a concern that has been expressed many times over in the past several decades. Part of the report of a study program and consultation on Theological Education in India, held in the year 1968, states,

The curriculum in theological colleges should be so oriented that the student should get a basic knowledge of the world around him [*sic*] and of the forces at work in the world. The study of the historic faith and contemporary society are both vital. This would enable him [*sic*] to be sensitive to the hopes, fears and frustrations of the people among whom he is to work. The Christian Gospel, if it is true to its genius, should meet the people at the point of their elemental needs and struggles.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, *Calendar and Yearbook 1999-2000*, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Theological Education in India: report of a Study Programme and Consultation 1967-68*, p. 17.



The document speaks of the need to reform and renew theological education if theological education institutions were to perform a better and more relevant service to the churches in India, which were undergoing tremendous change and challenges. The reform and renewal of theological education, it was argued, was necessary due to the dissatisfaction with traditional curriculum and methods of teaching in the theological seminaries because they are too remote from life and irrelevant to the concerns and issues of society. The concern was not expressed solely to the content and methodology of teaching, for they were only parts, significant as they were, but to the whole enterprise of theological education. And now almost 21 years later the same concern is still being expressed.

The concern is valid, and institutions are trying hard to conceive and build a theological education that is relevant. But even where theological schools have attempted to address these issues, the student is unable to transfer or put one's knowledge into action. This has therefore resulted in the relative isolation of theological institutions from the church and the wider society. Hence, C. L. Perrin describes theological colleges as "seed beds" or "sheltered gardens" where plants seem to grow well but wither away after being transplanted in the parish gardens. D. A. Thangasamy, an Indian thinker, laments the fact that theological education has become like an "academic gown" hired for the occasion of graduation and returned in tact after the ceremony is over. It has very little relevance or application in one's work after graduation.<sup>3</sup> There may be several reasons for this, but this makes it all the more necessary for us to reconsider the content and method of theological education as a matter of urgent concern.

But first, it would be wrong to imply that accredited schools of theology are the only vehicles for ministerial education, or that ministry itself can be confined to the traditional roles and functions of "professional" and ordained clergy. A comprehensive study of theological education would include an examination of Bible schools, "training" schools for missionaries and other lay professionals, and church school programs that engage lay people in local parishes in preparation for many forms of ministry.

But theological seminaries and theological educators do have a special burden. The renewal of every ecclesial community depends on having an environment in which the difficult questions are asked. That is part of the way seminaries serve as intellectual centers on behalf of the Church. Because seminaries ask difficult questions, there will always be tensions between them and the people in the church. But this tension between church and seminary

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<sup>3</sup> V. Devasahayam, "Theological Education for Social Change" (paper presented at the consultation of the International Network in Advanced Theological Education, Chennai, India, August 1997), p.2.



needs to be understood as a legitimate process of religious testing, rather than creating a dichotomy between the seminary and the Church.<sup>4</sup>

### **Theological Education in Context**

Theological education is rarely unrelated to given contexts, needs, demands and expectations. Nevertheless, it would be legitimate to want to probe into the nature of the context and to ask whose needs and demands were or are being met. How deep has theology's concern been with the concrete social situation in which it was taking place? How firm has its rootedness been in actual history? How far have the economic and political processes been taken into account, not only as something eternally related, but as intrinsic to the doing of theology? I am at this time reminded of the theologies of scholars, namely Rahner or Aquinas. What context were they addressing as they wrote their theologies?

I firmly believe that theological education and formation of our seminaries must be given in continuous encounter with the problems, questions, and challenges of the world outside. So, a mere academic formation of a speculative type, in abstract and absolute categories of revelation and dogmas, and the underlying concept of a universal and perennial theology, are inadequate and unacceptable. Although Christian faith is transcendental and transcultural, it is expressed and experienced only in the framework of particular histories, cultures, languages, philosophies and thought patterns. Hence there cannot be any one universal Christian culture, or any one 'perennial' Christian philosophy valid for all times, all places, and all peoples. It points to the need of diversity in theology, in its methods and approaches, and consequently diversity in the seminary training and curriculum. But all of them are at one, I guess, in being purposeful. The burden of theological education is not borne merely to fulfill legal requirements for ordination to the priesthood. A priest or a Christian minister is not a "poojari" who is exclusively in charge of a certain religious cult and rituals, but a minister of Christ who is entrusted with the prophetic and liberating Word of God which is the Good News of salvation and liberation for the entire humanity. And the minister's mission includes, like that of Jesus, healing the sick and the afflicted, liberating the oppressed and the captives, and feeding the hungry.<sup>5</sup>

### **Theological Education: Faith seeking Understanding**

Traditionally we have understood the function of theological education as "equipping" the whole people of God for their respective ministries. The narrower understanding of this

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<sup>4</sup> "Seminaries and the Ecology of Faith: An interview with Daniel Aleshire," *The Christian Century*, 3-10 February 1999, p. 123.

<sup>5</sup> Felix Wilfred (ed), *Theological Education in India Today* (Bangalore: ATC, 1984), p. viii.



function is the professional formation of few, selected (called) men and (very few) women for the church's ministry. The church's ministry itself is understood as the work done by the paid or unpaid "church worker." The church workers are pastors, teachers, evangelists or Bible women. In this view, theological education assumes the role of a factory whose job is to produce or manufacture that for which there is a demand and a market. The Church represents both the demand and the market. Theological education in this model is like a "formula" employed in the production of a certain type or types of goods. Theological curricula or "models" then become different variations or modifications of the basic "formula" directed towards the production of certain goods needed for different ministries. Basically this is a capitalistic understanding of theological education and smacks of professionalism.<sup>6</sup>

My concern for a dynamic and processive ontology of theological education raises some questions. Does theological education have only an instrumental and functional value? Is it not possible for us to affirm that theological education is itself one of the ministries of the church? Is it necessary to speak in terms of a "tool" and "for" something? I would suggest that theological education itself is a self-educative ministry of the church. It is an exercise that is to be carried out by the whole people of God. If we are to press further the Biblical metaphor of the church as the body of Christ, we should say that theological education is the "faculty of this body that articulates, expresses, critically examines and reflects upon" its faith.

Most traditional theologies, no matter what their frame of reference, have defined theology as "faith seeking understanding." Faith is presented as consent of the mind to revealed truth(s). For us the truth is Jesus who justifies and redeems. When God comes offering us God's love and self, we may respond by committing ourselves wholly to God. That response is faith. Faith is a self-giving act and attitude, which conveys to God our whole reality as persons as community. This is done here on earth, within our history. Therefore, the commitment carries in its path all our historical concerns, tasks, involvements and relationships. All these historical realities will then be interior to the faith as it seeks understanding.

Faith commitment to God is at the same time commitment to God's design for creation and history. It includes the promise and acceptance of partnership with God in bringing creation to completion and history to fulfillment. Faith here is recognized as active and bound up with human strivings in all areas of existence including, economics, politics, art, culture and the organization of society. Faith's search for understanding cannot be adequate or authentic

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<sup>6</sup> Arvind P. Nirmal, "Patterns of Theological Education for a Pluralistic Ministry in India," *Theological Education and Development*, ed. Gnana Robinson et al., (Bangalore: Association of Theological Teachers in India, 1984), pp. 48-49



apart from these historical endeavors. That means that the faith which orients and conveys us to God also orients and conveys us at the same time to the world, to history and to people.<sup>7</sup>

This historical-human dimension of faith is what the New Testament calls love: love for the neighbor, the sister, the brother. To have faith in God is to be in love with people. Loving people is more than giving them alms and aid, more than keeping them forever dependent at the receiving end. To love neighbors truly would mean to work with them, to create a new world in which dignity and freedom of everybody is secure, a world in which all can have food and the right to speak and relate to one another in love without threat or fear. It is a society of plenty and justice for all, and of peace where everyone can partake in decision making, where lamb and lion dwell together, and where swords are converted into plough shares and people rest under their fig trees. Love consists in concrete historical caring and concern. If love is all embracing and universal and includes enemies too, its thrust cannot be confined to private inter-personal relationships. Its main thrust will have to be to remake the world so that all women and men can have life in abundance in a new set-up of equality and freedom. Live faith can really seek understanding only in and through a committed struggle to transform the world. Theological education and reflection are there to elucidate and support action for change in the direction of equality and freedom rooted in the very material basis of our earthly existence.

According to the Gospel, the content of faith is the Reign of God and its coming. "The Kingdom [*sic*] is at hand ... believe in the good news."

The Reign of God is a transforming force like yeast and like new wine. It is meant to cause a social ferment, an up-rising of the oppressed human dough which will then break through the old wine skins and socio-economic structures and make for a new style of life in community.<sup>8</sup>

That is why the coming and the nearness of the Reign of God summons us to conversion. "The Kingdom is at hand, repent (be converted, change your lives) and believe in the good news." Conversion is not only an event occurring inside the head or the heart. It is change of life, change of its direction and new relationships embodied and expressed in the very economic basis of life. Faith-acceptance of the Reign of God therefore includes commitment to struggle for the transformation of society and the creation of a "new earth." It follows

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<sup>7</sup> Gnana Robinson, *A Journey Through Theological Education*, (Chennai: CLS, 1989).

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Ryan S.J., "Theological Education in the Social Context of India Today," *Theological Education in India Today*, ed. Felix Wilfred, (Bangalore: ATC, 1984), p. 15.



therefore that faith's quest for understanding cannot proceed except within an ongoing action for social and economic revolution.

The conclusion is that faith-seeking-understanding is in reality, faith working for human transformation both personal and social, and change in the total condition of existence, the direction of change being indicated by the Reign of God. Theology is critical reflection on the social practice of the faith with a view to the furtherance of that practice. It is born of practice and gives birth to finer practice at a higher/deeper level of the human being. Theological education consists in the critical sharing of such reflection within the community. It is and has to be historical, earthly, contextual and transformative.

### **Transformation**

What is to be transformed? This world consisting of us and of the cultures and structures we have created. This earth, where the Reign of God comes and grows. The Reign comprehends all reality and leaves nothing out. Its entry, growth and trials are interlocked with the reality of the earth and our history. This history weaves its fabric with our economic and political activities and religio-cultural experiences. The transformation which the Reign demands and offers, is respectful of the primacy of the people over the Law. It seeks to serve the emergence of women and men who are rich in humanity and in human need. It envisions human beings not as dominated by the production process nor by the products of human work nor by the power of those who accumulate wealth through exploitation, but as free and equal, as creators of the human world and its wealth, as subjects of their own life and history. People will work and produce to meet human needs not within unequal relationships of domination and dependence but within expanding horizons of sisterhood and brotherhood and mutual complementarity.

If I may adapt what Bas Wilenga says, the expectation is not merely that the practice of the Reign of God will do away with unequal distribution and will create conditions of proper satisfaction of basic, physical needs. There is far more to the transformation in question. The practice of the Reign of God will work imaginatively to create an alternative society in which the whole wealth of human needs can be satisfied. It will cultivate not the crude needs among the rich but the human needs among all. It will not promote the never-ending drive for profit for the few, nor urge to have and to consume ever more and more. It will rather summon and enable people "to become human beings, to be creative and communicative, to find their identity in what they are, rather than in what they have." It will not encourage competition and primacy at the cost of others, but promote togetherness and complementarity, "knowing that one is incomplete without the others," knowing that the 'greatest wealth' all human



beings need is 'the other human being'.<sup>9</sup> In other words, it is a community of rich and abundant humanity, of equality, freedom and justice, of love and peace that the leaven of the Reign of God and of the Gospel is fermenting. That is the dream too, and the dynamism of theological education.

Commitment then to social transformation in the direction of a truly human world is an essential requirement of the theological task. Without it theology will be idealistic and hence untrue both to the Reign of God and to human history. Commitment implies and calls for a clear, comprehensive grasp of the existing situation. Regarding the Indian context, it comprises a complex of economic and political forces, tangled social structures and a variety of religious traditions, cultural heritages and ideological stances, and the following is a brief description of it.

### **India: Socio-economic and Political Reality**

Our present purpose does not require a thorough analytical presentation, supported by statistics, of the vast field of social, political and economic structures and processes in our country. This is the task of economists, political scientists and sociologists. The point we wish to stress is that theology cannot ignore the findings and interpretations of the human sciences. Theology has to take these no less into account than the realities and experiences of the life of the people. Here we shall try to convey an impressionistic picture of the Indian scene by making the barest mention of certain facts and features, based on observations.

India is a land of variety and differences, of crisis and contradictions. Some of these contribute to the nation's richness and beauty. Others amount to deep divisions of caste, gender, class, religion and language. The greatest division is between the rich and the poor, the latter comprised of the majority of the Dalits. Our most vexing issue is poverty side by side with affluence, together with great progress accentuating backwardness. Out of every three Indians, one has wealth and power, and lives in comfort. The second lives in deprivation, hunger and squalor, harassed and violated in many ways usually on account of caste. The third moves in between, climbing or falling, structurally insecure. The gulf is visible in city, town and village. The contrasts strike the eye and boggle the mind: contrast between the privileged classes/castes and the outcastes; between the well housed and the homeless; the posh residential areas and the foul slums; the costly fashionable five star hotels and the garbage bins where boys and girls, young citizens of the Republic of India, scavenge for something to eat and struggle to prolong the dying process; between the landless and the landlords who own thousands of acres and control whole clusters of villages and terrorize entire regions with their private police.

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<sup>9</sup> Bas Wilenga, *Introduction to Marxism* (Bangalore: ATS, 1983), pp. 97-100.



Perhaps some of the richest people in the world are in India and surely a majority of the poorest. The depth of misery and suffering is equaled only by its extent. It is agreed that almost half the population lives below the poverty line defined in terms of a minimum of subsistence food alone. Staggering economic inequalities mean unequal political power, unequal social participation, cultural deprivation, political marginalization and many-sided oppression. Even the paper-equality of election votes is often absent. The votes of the dependent have-nots in slums and villages are bought or commandeered with money and muscle.

The situation is rife with tensions and contradictions, which erupt naturally or are politically organized into riots, arson and massacres. Violence keeps growing as the compulsions of our economic system weighs heavier on various classes. The contradictions express themselves in the deepening discontent and restlessness of the oppressed; in the politicization and irruption of the poor, the landless and the masses. This then is met with harsher repression on the part of those in power. The atrocities unleashed over the last decade against the Dalits, the Tribals and the poor of the cities - the slum dwellers in various parts of the country - are evidence of the conflicts brewing in the heart of Indian society.

Despite independence, democracy and planning, and despite great progress in industry, science, technology and productivity, the basic human needs of the bulk of the population have not been satisfied. The process of globalization set in motion the widening of the gap between the haves and the have-nots and has begun a process of exclusion of the poor. There has been an erosion of culture as the lifestyles of the people are re-oriented towards the Market. The worst victims of this process are the subaltern peoples struggling to reemerge while the dominant adapt to the global culture.

In such a situation, commitment to social transformation becomes commitment to the liberation of the oppressed. The action indicated by faith would lead us to opt for the victims of the system. We side with the poor, knowing both from the biblical story and from social history that the oppressed as a class are the agents of change. Already the poor are beginning to stir. There is a growing awareness among them of the nature of the system, of the cause of their poverty and deprivation, of the possibilities of change, of their rights and the tremendous potential of their collective power. They realize that they should work out their path to salvation and they know how. They also have allies among the intelligentsia: committed journalists who expose injustices done to the poor; the organizers of legal aid; the movements for women's rights; the supreme court's new hermeneutics of the law; the people's theatres and science for the people's movements; the grass roots workers helping to raise awareness and to organize; the social scientists who disclose the hidden mechanisms of oppression native to the established system; and the radical students. Commitments to the



oppressed and taking sides with them along with their allies should be the basis and starting point of theological reflection and theological education.<sup>10</sup>

This is the first step. But in it, a word about God and about what it means to have faith in God, is implied. In a second step, this content of commitment may be spelt out. The Geneva statement of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) holds that "it is not possible to do Christian theology without making a political commitment in solidarity with the poor...Commitment to the community of the oppressed affects...the identity of the emerging theologies."<sup>11</sup>

## **Method**

The first step is what we have already been describing, namely *siding with the oppressed, sharing in their suffering, and participating in their struggles*. Our faith impels us to do this; our sense of justice moves us; and our anger at the outrageous conditions to which the people are relegated bids us.

The next step is to acquire a fairly comprehensive and scientifically valid analytical understanding of the social reality. Not that everybody engaged in theological work should be a specialist in politics, economics and sociology, but surely it is possible and necessary to utilize with critical insight the secure findings and conclusions of the human sciences. For theology to be able to discern where God is present and what God is doing in our history; for it to be able to inspire, motivate, support and participate in such social transformation, some in-depth grasp of social reality, in itself so complex, is a necessity. *Structural analysis* - insight into the reality of classes and conflict of interests and an understanding of the inter-relationship of systems - is needed. It is important to note how ideology is produced and used by various classes and the role religion is made to play. The dominant group and its cultural influence will have to be determined and the mechanisms of domination noted. One might say in the language of faith that we are here seeking to discern the structures of grace and of sin, to recognize the possibilities for love, and to trace the paths of the Reign of God.

At this point we should survey and *study carefully the response to the situation from the churches and other religions*. The response must be critically evaluated. One asks how qualitatively adequate the response is; why this precise response has been given, this particular service offered, and this policy followed in preference to one or more other

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<sup>10</sup> Gnana Robinson, *A Journey Through Theological Education*, pp. 72ff.

<sup>11</sup> *Doing Theology in a Divided World*, Statement of the Sixth EATWOT Conference, (1983), Nos 39-40.



possibilities. Is this the response called for by the objective reality of the situation? Is this what the faith enjoins? How far may our reading of the faith and of the situation and our choice of the response have been influenced, perhaps subtly and subconsciously by our class positions, educational bias, and established interests? Here we are using the hermeneutics of suspicion, and suspicion is in order. We need to suspect influences from the personal subconscious (Freud) and also the social subconscious (Marx). Both need to be analyzed with a view to clarity and liberation.

For a final evaluation and further guidance in action, we need the vital values and orientations of biblical faith. We therefore *listen afresh to the Word of God* and accept it as judging our options and practices. In other words, the liberating word of God becomes the yardstick by which we measure and judge our responses. Three important observations must be made at this point in relation to this:

- A. We need to *employ the best results of modern biblical scholarship* to ascertain the meaning and the message of the bible and thereby avoid fundamentalism and inappropriate interpretations.
- B. We need to ensure that the *Word of God and our faith response to it are considered as partners in dialog with the actual socio-political context and are made to interact critically and creatively*. Only through such a method can we discover Scripture's meaning for today and hear its loving message. Only so can the Word be welcomed as addressed to us and lived out in the actual situation.
- C. Both the *Bible and the context have to be viewed and read from the place of the people from below (oppressed women, men and children), and through their eyes, their sufferings and struggles and aspirations*. That is the way to detect mechanisms of oppression and to release and appropriate the liberational power of the faith. The Scriptures themselves had their origin in the struggles of the oppressed for liberation and in the reflection of all who participated in the struggle. There is no neutral, uncommitted, purely objective reading of reality.

Each of our countries has its own genius and specific cultural, philosophical and religious heritage. It is our theological task to *explore our rich traditions* through which God spoke to our ancestors. It is equally important to have a deep understanding of the forces, religious and secular, shaping our countries today and to discuss what God is saying to God's church through the events of the day. There is therefore a reciprocity and dialectic between the biblical text and the socio-political context for it is at the point of their critical encounter and change that a living theology emerges.

The ancient Indian educational system may not be viable model for us today. But its spirit of sacredness of all education, the rigor, discipline and hard work it demands, and the personal,



experiential way of communicating knowledge through an intimate relationship between the teacher and the students, and life in harmony and communion with nature, are some of the values which should not be bypassed in our system of theological education. In the context of plurality of religions, we need not merely espouse a theology of tolerance and co-existence but a theology that functions as a unifying force. Such a theology cannot but be also dialogical. In short, theologizing has to be "an inter-religious and inter-faith experience."<sup>12</sup>

Enriched with these insights and experiences, we turn again to the realms of practice. Practice can now be weighed and asserted afresh in the light of the Word as heard in and through the mediation of historical reality. Our understanding of God and Jesus will in this way be historical. Socio-political realities will be constitutive factors in the theological process and not merely an external reality to which theology, already made, would be applied.

### **Implications**

We need to *study new themes and new questions* and recover stories of resistance and struggles of liberation within our own histories, and the role played by prophetic and messianic figures who emerged from time to time.

Reflection on our history as the realm of revelation and faith will lead to a critical *discernment of how history and religion have interacted down the ages*. What is the nature of religion, which lends itself to keep people passive in the face of oppression or motivates them to build freedom and history or to destroy them? *A theological re-evaluation of the commercial and colonial context in which the churches originated*, and of their connection and collaboration with colonialism, past or present, in pacifying consciences is called for. How the colonial rule has influenced our thinking, promoted submission and resignation, and diverted attention to life after death while robbing the land and violating its honor, needs to

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Manickam, "Theological Education in the Cultural, Philosophical and Religious Context of India Today," *Theological Education in India Today*, ed. Felix Wilfred (Bangalore: ATC, 1984), pp. 33-66. I call attention here to the Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia (PTCA) which helps young theologians to do theology with the resources from the Asian soil. It promotes a theological methodology that is more conducive to contextual theologizing. It seeks to discover the Asian ways for doing Christian theology today and in our long histories. If we have been given for our faith and theologizing both the text of the Bible and the text of Asian life, how do these interact and inter-penetrate? As C. S. Song would say, there are two major texts for our theological reflection – the Christian Scriptures and the life stories of our Asian people in their particular religio-cultural, and socio-political settings.



be taken into consideration.<sup>13</sup> Along with this, the ecclesiologies that have evolved will come in for rethinking,.

In the context of wide-spread poverty and marginalization, untouchability, sexism and racism, *what would evangelization mean?* What would be the good news for these people? What news would be hope-giving? How can it be proclaimed convincingly? How could it be made tangible and given solid historical truth content? Evangelism will have to be articulated afresh in terms of socially transformative deed and liberative alliance and action. Then the Church will begin to re-conceive herself as a "small batch of ferment of the Kingdom, which God places in the dough of the oppressed."<sup>14</sup>

Critical faith-reflection on the oppressed and the Dalits would bring up, with new urgency, the neglected themes of the outcast servant and of God who became an outcast in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 13: 11-13), power and powerlessness, and the weakness and foolishness of God (I Corinthians 1) to enable the Church to play a more prophetic role. In a world of struggle for power and domination over the weak, theology cannot but take up for study the patterns and structures of power and powerlessness, and the dialectic that obtains between them. The dialectics of love's powerlessness is love's power. The dialectics of the option for the poor are in order to empower the powerless and empower love to eliminate power, which has no love.<sup>15</sup>

That God exists is beyond doubt. The question is how to tell the true and living God from the idols to whom brides and Dalits and children are offered in holocaust? The theological question is: on whose side is God? Is it the one that sees the affliction of the people and acts to liberate them, or the one that sits enthroned in temples to watch costly liturgies and the rich who put them up prosper with ill gotten gains? *Our understanding of God, the human being, the creation, Church, and Worship need to be evaluated and approached from the perspective of the marginalized.*<sup>16</sup>

On the structural level, this kind of theological education will demand considerable change in the seminary set up. Besides books and lectures, people too ought to become an indispensable

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. R. Sugirtharajah, *Asian Biblical Hermeneutics and Post Colonialism: Contesting the Interpretations*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> Samuel Ryan, S. J., "Theological Education in the Social Context of India Today," *Theological Education in India Today*, ed. Felix Wilfred (Bangalore: ATC, 1984), p. 28.

<sup>15</sup> Gerald O. West, *The Academy of the Poor: Towards a Dialogical Reading of the Bible*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Gnana Robinson, *A Journey Through Theological Education*, pp. 80ff.

source and place of theology. *Closeness to the people and participation in their struggles are fundamental to the theological process.* One cannot therefore remain all or most of the time within the walls of the academy. Considerable time will have to be spent with the people. Action will have a certain primacy. However, it leads to and is accompanied by reflection, implying both deeper analysis of the situation of involvement, and a dialog between social reality and the vision of faith.

Theological education is an ongoing process. It is a process by which the Church educates herself and builds herself up, and equips herself to collaborate with the people in their project of liberation and the creation of a New World. It is necessary therefore that pastors and people, professional theologians and others, students and activists, remain open to one another in close contact.





## THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION: A TOOL FOR TRANSFORMATION

*Dr. James Kenneth Echols*

### **Introduction**

It is an honor to stand before such a distinguished, global group of Lutheran leaders in theological education to reflect with you on the assigned topic, "*Theological Education: A Tool for Transformation*." In accepting this invitation, I was pleased to discover that I would be sharing the podium with Dr. Monica Melancthon, our sister in Christ, a gifted, young teacher and theologian, someone whom I consider a friend, and one whom I am proud to claim as an alumna of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC). It is indeed good to be present at, as well as to participate in, this consultation, and I thank all those responsible for convening it.

Two preliminary comments are in order before addressing the topic. The first is that my remarks primarily grow out of my involvement in and knowledge of theological education in the North American context. Through the Lutheran World Federation, I have been privileged to attend Lutheran Third World Theological Educators conferences in Brazil in 1988 and Malaysia in 1992. In addition, I gained much from serving on a three-person LWF team in 1997 that assessed proposals for the future development of Lutheran theological education institutions and resources in South Africa. Yet, I am most familiar with the North American situation, and my remarks assume and grow out of that context.

Thus, I will leave it to you to determine whether and how my understanding of the North American context relates to your own context.

A second preliminary comment is this. My reflections are intended to be exploratory and suggestive rather than in any sense comprehensive. However, I hope they will stimulate your own thinking as together we engage in the process of revisioning theological education for the 21st century.

### **Theological Education: A Tool for Transformation?!**

It is interesting to note that the topic, "*Theological Education: A Tool for Transformation*," is devoid of any punctuation at its end. If we located a question mark at its end, it would lead us to discuss whether and to what extent theological education has served as a tool for the preservation of the status quo and the oppression of the powerless. It would certainly require



those of us in the North American context to historically recognize the ways in which theological education has excluded women from full participation in the life of the church or has marginalized the full humanity of Native Americans and people of African descent.

On the other hand, if we placed an exclamation point at the end of the topic title, it would lead us to affirm the crucial role that theological education has played and can play as a tool for transformation. In this regard, North American Christians could point to the fuller inclusion of women or the decreased marginalization of Native Americans and people of African descent as being attributable, at least in part, to theological education. Hence, its potential for changing a status quo understood to be antithetical to God's people and purposes in the world would be acknowledged.

Recently, I have been reminded of the extent to which North American theological educators do regard theological education as a tool for transformation with an exclamation point at its end. Consider the following four illustrations:

1. In 1997, Professor Kathleen Hughes of the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago published an article in the journal *Theological Education* entitled "Conversion of Mind and Heart in Theological Education." The article grew out of an annual meeting of the Midwest Association of Theological Schools at which participants explored the question of "whether and to what extent we can identify change happening within our students in the course of their studies." For Professor Hughes, this issue was intriguing, because a 1993 Program of Priestly Formation document suggested that "the goal of intellectual formation is the conversion of mind and heart."

Using the terms conversion, change, and transformation interchangeably, Professor Hughes shared the results of student exit interviews in which students were invited to reflect on whether they had been changed, i.e. transformed, as a result of their seminary studies. Based upon a variety of testimonies of change, she concluded that theological education is a tool for transformation and therefore urged theological educators to "attend to our students' capacity for change in the classroom and ways in which the classroom environment may become more congenial to such personal appropriation and the transformation that follows."<sup>1</sup>

2. Earlier this year (1999), Daniel Aleshire, Executive Director of the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, shared his views on a variety of issues in theological education. At one point, in response to a question about the priority of spiritual formation in seminaries today, Aleshire made an historical

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<sup>1</sup> Kathleen Hughes, "Conversion of Mind and Heart in Theological Education," *Theological Education* 33 (Spring 1997): pp. 1-10.

comment. He remarked that in previous generations "the seminary's task was to, in a sense, deconstruct certain of the students' theological perceptions in order to reconstruct a more intellectually viable way of understanding their own sense of being persons of faith, as well as to deconstruct and reconstruct their understanding of life and ministry in a particular denominational context."<sup>2</sup> Here, the invocation of the words "deconstruction" and "reconstruction" point to the fact that theological education has traditionally been regarded as a tool for transformation, in this case the transformation of students into religious leaders.

3. This past spring (1999), LSTC's faculty was engaged for a second straight year in the search for a New Testament professor. In May of 1998, the seminary's Board of Directors had extended a call to an outstanding candidate upon the recommendation of the faculty. However, the candidate declined the call, making it necessary for the search committee to continue its work. When the committee identified three new possibilities, each was brought to campus for a public presentation and faculty interview. On one occasion, a certain candidate asked the faculty to share its understanding of its teaching ministry. After a pause as faculty members looked at one another to determine who would respond first, one professor used the word "transformation" to characterize her goal and approach to theological education and the preparation of women and men for ministry. If Professor Kleingartner were here today, she would affirm the placement of an exclamation mark at the end of our topic title.
4. Most recently, the Summer 1999 edition of "*In Trust*," a magazine for leaders in North American theological education, published a sermon delivered last September by Charles R. Foster, interim dean at Candler School of Theology, to students at that school. The two captions that accompanied the sermon were "Leaving Home and the 'Danger' of Change" and "The Wilderness as Catalyst of Spiritual Transformation." Foster declared that even as the wilderness was a place where the faith of the Israelites was renewed and transformed, so seminary was intended to be for Candler students a place for renewal and transformation. This had been his experience of theological education, and he hoped it would be theirs as well.<sup>3</sup> Again, transformation is central to theological education.

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<sup>2</sup> "Seminaries and the Ecology of Faith: An interview with Daniel Aleshire," *The Christian Century* (3-10 February 1999): p. 111.

<sup>3</sup> "Charles R. Foster, "Leaving Home and the Danger of Change," *In Trust* (Summer 1999): p. 7.



## **Theological Education and the Transforming Gospel**

That theological education is a tool for transformation will come as no great surprise or new revelation to us. We know that theological education is an integral part of the mission of the Gospel, the goal of which is transformation as witnessed to in the New Testament. In Matthew's Gospel, the Risen Christ came to the disciples gathered on a Galilean mountain and charged them to go and make disciples (Matthew 28:16-20). In essence, they were called to transform non-believers into believers in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. In the book of II Corinthians, the Apostle proclaimed that all who were in Christ were new creations, the old having passed away in favor of the new (II Corinthians 5:17). In other words, transformation had taken place. In the twelfth chapter of the book of Romans, the Apostle exhorted the Roman Christians to be transformed by the renewing of their minds through the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:2).

Theological education, therefore, (which I am distinguishing here from Christian education) is an integral part of the mission of the Gospel. Its task is, in most cases, to transform the transformed for public service as lay and ordained leaders in the church. Normally, this task has been assigned to seminaries whose mission statements refer to the "preparation" or "formation" of God's baptized people for ministry. As such, I believe that another appropriate synonym for the task of theological education that our institutions discharge is "transformation." As a theological concept,<sup>4</sup> transformation refers to the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit among and through God's baptized people. In the context of theological education, transformation refers to the curricular process (broadly understood) through which students, faculty, and institutions:

1. come to know the will of God through *study* ("faith seeking understanding" to use Augustine's language);
2. become God's incarnate will in their lives through *spiritual formation*; and
3. do God's loving and liberating will in the world via *social transformation*.

## **Transformation in a Changing Cultural Context**

Much has been written about the changing cultural context in North America, a context that has traditionally been sexist, racist, capitalist, and homophobic. Ten years ago, Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon of Duke University published a book entitled *Resident Aliens*. Advertised as "a provocative Christian assessment of culture and ministry," the book's first chapter included a major section on "A Changed World." In this section, the

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[This statement of concept and definition was proposed by the author during plenary discussion of this topic during the consultation, and was well received. Ed.]

authors cited a certain Sunday evening in 1963 in Greenville, South Carolina when, in defiance of the state's blue laws, the Fox Movie Theater opened its doors and showed a John Wayne western. This occurrence represented the advance, if not the total triumph, of secularism in a culture that had formerly understood itself to be Christian. "Our point," wrote Hauerwas and Willimon, "is that, before the Fox Theater opened on Sunday, Christians could deceive themselves into thinking that we were in charge, that we made a difference, that we had created a Christian culture."<sup>5</sup> As a result of this cultural shift, the authors referred to the demise of "Constantinianism" in North American culture and suggested that North American Christians found themselves in a context similar to that of the early Christians. Increasingly, individual Christians and the church should regard themselves as resident aliens, "in" a secular world but not "of" it.

Here, it needs to be observed that secularism in North American culture should not be equated with the demise of religion or of religious interest. Rather, it has to do with religion's privatization and marginalization as a significant influence on the development of cultural norms.

Douglas John Hall also has written about the changing or changed North American culture. In a small volume entitled *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity*, Hall asserted that "secularism continues to oppose religion, while technology has emerged as a major source of power and authority in modern culture. Both confront Christian faith with fundamental questions."<sup>6</sup> In another place, Hall declared, "This religion (referring to Christianity) has been a great power in the world. It can still be regarded here and there as though its imperial status were yet intact, but it is nevertheless in the process of being reduced. Although some semblance of Christendom may find a new home in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, its period of western dominance is over."<sup>7</sup> Given this changed cultural context, Hall suggested that the church should intentionally disengage from the culture in order to engage it meaningfully, becoming salt, yeast, and light in this post-Christian era.<sup>8</sup>

Clearly, a changing cultural context challenges the church to shape and reshape its mission and ministry of transformation in ways that are faithful, relevant, and effective. This

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<sup>5</sup> Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 17.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas John Hall, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity* (Valley Forge, PA.: Trinity Press International, 1997), p. vii.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 43, 51.



challenge also applies, in a very special way, to theological education, because seminaries prepare those leaders who will "equip the saints for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:12)." Recognizing this unique responsibility, Loren Mead, an Episcopal priest who founded The Alban Institute, a para-church organization in the United States, wrote the following words in his 1991 book *The Once and Future Church*:

Clergy are, I believe, a key resource for the future church. They are badly needed to ground the new structures in which lay people will gather to be formed and sent. They are critical training officers for the church of the future. The educational systems we have for training clergy, however, were invented to produce pastoral leadership for a Christendom Church. Those systems know how to add or change course offerings, but they still – as educational systems – prepare for a role and a world that parish pastors no longer face. Seminaries face the need for major changes while facing escalating costs and decreased resources.<sup>9</sup>

A similar sentiment was expressed in a 1994 article entitled, "What Is the Character of Curriculum, Formation, and Cultivation of Ministerial Leadership in the Good Theological School?" The article summarized the reflections of a group of twelve theological educators who gathered in 1993 in Chicago. Taking note of the increasing privatization, marginalization, and exclusion of religion from North American cultural life, the authors concluded:

In light of the above changes in North American religious life, it is not surprising that theological schools are reevaluating themselves in terms of curriculum, formation, and preparation for church leadership. The good theological school cannot continue to operate as though nothing has changed.<sup>10</sup>

It is precisely the need for reevaluation or, to use the consultation word "revisioning," that led the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to undertake a comprehensive Study of Theological Education in 1990. The process, which produced among other things eleven imperatives for theological education, culminated with the preparation of a final report that was entitled "Faithful Leaders for a Changing World: Theological Education for Mission in the ELCA."

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<sup>9</sup> Loren B. Mead, *The Once And Future Church* (The Alban Institute, 1991), p. 54.

<sup>10</sup> Donald Senior and Timothy Weber, "What Is the Character of Curriculum, Formation, and Cultivation of Ministerial Leadership in the Good Theological School?" *Theological Education* 30 (Spring 1994): p. 19.

My point here is that theological education, in that cultural context termed the era of Christendom, transformed students in ways that were appropriate to that context. Some have suggested that, in this era, seminaries essentially prepared clergy who were chaplains of an established and defined community of faith and who were not called to critically engage the culture. It would be fair to say that a certain consensus regarding transformation in theological education existed along the lines suggested above by Daniel Aleshire. However, the advance of secularism, the rise of political and socio-economic liberation movements among women, people of color and the poor, and changed demographics have contributed to the creation of a different North American cultural context. And it is this different cultural context that demands and requires a different approach to transformation through theological education.

### **Proposals for Transformation in Theological Education**

The changed cultural situation in North America has given rise to various proposals regarding theological education. And if it is true that theological education is a tool for transformation in service of the church's mission, then each of these proposals involves transformation. Ultimately, this transformation has to do not only with the individual being prepared for ministry, but also with how the individual will minister in ways that transform both the congregation and the community, i.e. the culture.

A first representative proposal for theological education as a tool for transformation grows out of the dominant community in North America. This proposal is grounded in the recognition that

North American Christians live in a post-Christian era, and this changed context requires that seminaries transform women and men to faithfully and effectively engage it. The transformation that is needed is suggested by the following statements:

- A. According to Douglas John Hall, "Instead of catering so exclusively to what are usually described as "pastoral needs" (though the term often cloaks institutional busyness), ministers today are recalled to the teaching office. If the minister of the congregation is not herself or himself in some genuine sense a theologian, we cannot expect lay persons to reflect some measure of the sort of informed thoughtfulness that is needed if we, as church, are to find a way into the future."<sup>11</sup>
- B. According to Senior, Weber, and their colleagues, "The truly effective religious leader is one who enables a community to mobilize its energies for the hard work of

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<sup>11</sup> Hall, *The End of Christendom and the Future of Christianity*, pp. 48-9.



transformation and adaptation to social change. The challenging task for leadership today may be in building up institutions rather than tearing them down."<sup>12</sup>

- C. According to Mead, "In the new ecclesia the primary theologians have to be the laity because they are on the missionary frontier.... Clergy and theological faculties need to be retooled to become resource persons to lay theologians."<sup>13</sup>
- D. According to the ELCA Study of Theological Education, "the ELCA needs faithful leaders who can share the gospel with unbelievers and lead communities of faith."<sup>14</sup>

Each of these statements relates to the changed cultural situation in North America and the kind of transformation that should be pursued through theological education for the sake of the transforming mission of the church in the world. Collectively, they represent aspects of one proposal regarding theological education as a tool for transformation.

A second representative proposal regarding theological education as a tool for transformation, grounded in gender analysis, has been articulated by Rebecca Chopp, a Candler School of Theology Professor, on behalf of women in a book entitled *Shifting Boundaries*. Referring to this proposal as "a feminist approach of prophetic transformism," Chopp acknowledged that prophetic feminism "has not produced a complete vision of theological education." Nevertheless, Chopp asserted that prophetic feminism, drawing upon the recent contributions of women both as scholars and students, offered a unique socio-political perspective that could inform the future of theological education. "Prophetic feminism," wrote Chopp, "invokes not an abstract goal of habitus but a historical goal of emancipatory transformation represented by the presence of liberation theologies in our current schools of theological education. The contemporary forms of liberation theology, such as feminist theology, African American theology, and Hispanic theology, criticize the systematic oppression of groups of persons and offer new ways of Christian faith, new ways of knowing, and new practices of education for all."<sup>15</sup> Through prophetic feminism, theological education as a tool for transformation would challenge the patriarchal and political structures of church and society

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<sup>12</sup> Senior and Weber, "What Is the Character of Curriculum, Formation, and Cultivation of Ministerial Leadership in the Good Theological School?" p. 30.

<sup>13</sup> Mead, *The Once and Future Church*, p. 56.

<sup>14</sup> "Faithful Leaders for a Changing World: Theological Education for Mission in the ELCA," report to the 1995 Churchwide Assembly, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Rebecca S. Chopp, "Situating the Structure: Prophetic Feminism and Theological Education," *Shifting Boundaries* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), p. 85.

and, in so doing, would attend to and seek to transform human relationships in church and society.

Yet a third representative proposal regarding theological education as a tool for transformation has been set forth by University of Chicago Divinity School Professor Dwight Hopkins on behalf of African Americans. In an article entitled "Black Theology on Theological Education," Hopkins stated, "From the perspective of a black theology of liberation, theological education pertains to how people of faith change the world for a communal sharing of resources given to humanity by God."<sup>16</sup> Given this understanding, Hopkins argued that its theological stance should be informed by God's concern for the oppressed and its theological method should emphasize integration and holism. Theological education should integrate theory and practice, a concern for both the self and the other, a criticism both of the self and the other, and a focus on both compassion and intellect. Ultimately, according to Hopkins, the vision for theological education as a tool for transformation should be to "continually reenvision full humanity - a new heaven and a new earth."<sup>17</sup> The natural consequence of such a vision would be the preparation of women and men who would be committed to the transformation of church and society in ways that would eliminate economic and racial forms of oppression.

## **Conclusion**

In my estimation, it is clear that theological education is a tool for transformation in service of the church's mission. Given this, our crucial considerations need to focus on understanding the cultural context in which theological education takes place, on what it means to faithfully proclaim the Good News in that cultural context, and on how that shapes the content, pedagogy, and methodology of seminary preparation. This is the challenge for all Lutheran theological institutions both now and in the future.

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<sup>16</sup> Dwight Hopkins, "Black Theology on Theological Education," *Theological Education* 34 (1998): p. 73.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.





## THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION: A TOOL FOR TRANSFORMATION

### *Response by participants*

In a plenary discussion, participants responded to the presentations and raised additional issues. Within the range of consultation topics, transformation was the most difficult topic to address, particularly in the attempt to summarize the conversations. Discussions often returned to the exploration of basic experiences, understandings and meanings. What follows is a summary of comments, questions and suggestions.

### GENERAL ISSUES

#### **The need for transformation**

It was suggested that in the midst of dramatic change that is affecting communication and relationships locally and globally, there is a great need for transformation that is qualitatively different from mere reaction or accommodation to change. Distinct from secular education, theological education has a commitment to God's justice and God's concern for the whole person throughout the stages of life. Therefore, theological education is, and must be, transformative - because it points to that "new heaven and new earth" that is already breaking into the heart of the world. Expressing this differently, we can say that transformation is God's process of actualizing the Reign of God. We are called and challenged to participation in this process.

Thus we affirm that theological education must allow space for what God can do to us, for us, among us, and through us. In the midst of change, we seek where and how God's Spirit may be leading, guiding and transforming. Our fear is that, too often, the actual experience of theological education is not one of transformation, but of stagnation and accommodation.

#### **Transformation: a working definition**

In the setting of our discussion of this topic, participants asked the presenters for a definition of transformation. The following working definition which they prepared was helpful in providing an anchor for further conversation.

As a theological concept, **transformation** refers to the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit among and through God's baptized people. In the context of theological



education, transformation refers to the curricular process (broadly understood) through which students, faculty and institutions:

- 1) come to know the will of God through *study* ("faith seeking understanding" to use Augustine's language);
- 2) become God's incarnate will in their lives through *spiritual formation*; and
- 3) do God's loving and liberating will in the world via *social transformation*.

*Prepared by Dr. James Echols and Dr. Monica Melanchthon, August 27, 1999*

### **What is transformation?**

Theological education around the world takes place in contexts that are buffeted by far-reaching and rapid change, and the response to such change is often ambivalent or confused. Some embrace change uncritically, acting to change things merely for the sake of change. Others fear change, retreating to patterns and practices that are familiar and comforting. If the Spirit is not working in change, it becomes chaotic and meaningless. But if the Spirit is working, change can be truly transforming and prophetic. In this sense, transformation is change that is inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit. Thus we begin to ask: how can we discern the working of the Spirit?

### **The locus of transformation: student, faculty, school, church, world**

While acknowledging that the whole of creation is the focus of God's transforming power, theological education is generally attentive to certain populations and contexts regarding efforts for transformation.

For example, we expect students to change during the course of their studies, while acknowledging that not all change is necessarily good. Sometimes students become alienated from the communities that nurtured them. How can we prevent this, and instead encourage ongoing connections? We also know that a student's readiness for change is influenced by prior interaction with the Bible and with others, both inside and outside the classroom. How can the readiness for change be encouraged?

There are related questions to consider. How much change can we expect of students without jeopardizing their sense of security and belonging within the church? How do we discern which students are gifted for particular ministries, especially those that may require formal theological education? How do we deal with students who are judged not to be suitable for such ministries and education? Where is transformation in these situations?

Regarding faculty, we acknowledged an *a priori* situation wherein educators must experience transformation with some degree of self-awareness before they can act intentionally to seek

transformation in others. How can faculty transformation be nurtured, especially in contexts of secular universities? It was also acknowledged that, at times, transformation may be easier or more difficult for individual faculty. Furthermore, transformation of individual faculty members may generate tension or division within the faculty group.

Regarding theological schools, some basic questions arose. Can we discern the dominant operating culture (e.g. prosperity, servanthood, sacrifice) of a theological school and how the school influences and enculturates its students and faculty? How does transformation relate to the whole context and functioning of a theological institution?

Going further, how does a theological institution, as an agent of change, relate to the church? We have often experienced that theological schools present the church with change or new directions, seeming to claim theological authority or even divine guidance. We have also experienced situations where the church has not included theological institutions in efforts to address issues of change which have dimensions of theological reflection or education.

In its relationships with the church and also in the wider context of the world, how can the institutions work more collaboratively with the churches in seeking and experiencing transformation?

## SUGGESTIONS

The conversations within issues groups produced suggestions that were not formalized as recommendations by the consultation, but nonetheless are worthy of further consideration.

### *Theological institutions are encouraged ...*

- to emphasize an ongoing process of transformation in theological education, involving the three aspects of knowing, being, and doing
- to give attention to pedagogy and method, allowing expression, experience, and reflection to happen in the classroom
- to call on teachers in all disciplines to lift up the spiritual dimensions of their disciplines
- to assist faculty to gain experience in contextualization as a tool for their own transformation (e.g. parish sabbaticals; dialoguing with communities outside the theological school; continuing education; experiences outside the theological school and the church)
- to be intentional about spiritual formation of faculty and students, recognizing that transformation happens in relationship
- to subject curriculum content and method to ongoing scrutiny
- to be open to structural change so that transformation can begin



***Churches and theological institutions are encouraged ...***

- to give comprehensive attention to spiritual formation throughout the church, and to discernment of the work of the Spirit
- to highlight the diversity of ministries in the church, including but not limited to pastoral ministry
- to recognize and support the importance of individual and corporate worship as crucial to the process of transformation

***Churches are encouraged ...***

- to develop programs and support for tent-making ministries
- to investigate follow-up structures for students to assist them in spiritual growth after graduation

*LWF Global Consultation on Theological Education*  
*August 23 to 27, 1999, Rome, Italy*  
*Revisioning Theological Education*

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ISSUE GROUPS  
REVISIONING THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION



*LWF Global Consultation on Theological Education*  
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"Group Discussion on Curriculum Content"



"Break - a time to share"



## ISSUE GROUPS: CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

### *Comments by participants*

Participants met separately in four issue groups to discuss particular topics in theological education. In the message issued from the consultation, the conversation from this group was summarized by encouraging theological institutions to work closely with churches as curriculum is developed and reviewed. Close cooperation is necessary in order to ground theological education in the realities and needs of church and society, and to identify and encourage future teachers in theology. Going into the next century, curriculum development should be especially attentive to issues of contextualization, spirituality, the insights provided by feminist and other liberation perspectives, transformation and ecumenics.

The following is a summary of conversations within this group.

### GENERAL THEMES

#### **Positive assessment of curriculum development**

The group positively assessed several aspects in curriculum development: efforts being made to improve curricula; growing efforts to seek contextual relevance in programs of study; ecumenical education in some form at almost all institutions; growing stress on feminist theology; growing concern for theological education for lay people as well as ordained ministers; increasing networks of various kinds among schools, leading to more interaction among students and faculty; in some places, less dependence on North American and European educators; and a growing commonality in accreditation and degrees offered.

#### **Questions and issues in curriculum development**

Further discussion about curriculum development identified the following clusters of questions and issues.

- How well are schools doing in addressing needs and desires for spirituality? What is an authentic Lutheran spirituality? With growing Pentecostal and charismatic presence in many contexts, how can pastors and other leaders be equipped to deal with Pentecostal theology?
- Feminist theology needs to have a more prominent place in the curriculum in many schools.



- In many cases, the relationships between theological schools and the churches needs to be clarified or improved.
- To what extent is the retention of such classical disciplines as Biblical languages still helpful? How can more students be encouraged to do advanced study in disciplines such as Biblical studies?
- Financial restrictions impede curriculum review and development.
- In some schools, many students lack basic knowledge of the Bible and the faith that was once taken for granted. In other schools, many students lack adequate language skills and knowledge in the basic humanities. In both cases, remedial work would enable such students to gain more from the curriculum.
- Teaching does not always take adequate account of the background, interests, and contextual reality of students as they begin their studies in theology.
- A shortage of qualified faculty in some basic areas of study is frequent, indicating a need for more intentional recruitment and facilitation of endorsement for advanced study and teaching. Long range planning is necessary.
- There is need for more faculty and student interchange between schools, especially along south-south lines.
- How can technology be put to better use (e.g. distance teaching and Internet)?
- There is need for better collecting and sharing of information concerning, for example, scholarships, study opportunities, publications, and innovative programs.
- There is a lack of good up-to-date published resources for many contexts. Publication needs to be supported and facilitated.
- A related problem is lack of time available to faculty members for study and writing.
- More advanced post-graduate study needs to be done locally or regionally, rather than in Europe or North America, to facilitate contextual study.
- In many places, churches and theological schools can work more cooperatively and intentionally to identify persons with skills and interests to serve in various capacities within the church, and to encourage and facilitate their development. However, this should not keep students from the free exploration of their vocation and call.

## SUGGESTIONS

The conversations within issues groups produced suggestions that were not formalized as recommendations by the consultation, but nonetheless are worthy of further consideration.

### *Churches and theological institutions are encouraged ...*

- to work together to define more clearly what is expected from the theological schools, to ensure that the curriculum is grounded in the actual realities of church and society
- to work together to develop programs and curricula of lay theological education as well as continuing education for lay and ordained leaders

- to be partners, identifying and encouraging future church leaders and theologians in a more proactive and intentional way
- to see theological education as playing a critical role in the life of the church

***Churches are encouraged ...***

- to do their utmost to be partners with theological schools in locating and having access to human and other resources including financial
- to be in partnership with theological schools in identifying and encouraging future teachers of theology
- to see theological education as a process that encourages freedom for critical interpretation of the Word of God in each context, so that the curriculum can be developed in such a way that it will be seen how theology is necessary for the ongoing reformation of the Church under the Word, not just as the means for maintenance of the church status quo

***Theological institutions are encouraged ...***

- to use theological principles in internal criticism and reform of curriculum, and to engage theology to address not only the church but also the society and the academy in which the school is located
- to develop an emphasis on contextual approaches throughout the whole curriculum, and to utilize cross-disciplinary approaches
- to explore Lutheran identity critically within changing contexts
- to include gender studies within the core curriculum
- to include a concern for spirituality in ministerial formation
- to engage in serious evaluation of the curriculum in the light of the preceding suggestions
- to do more long range planning and development of present and future faculty, so that as the curriculum changes and develops, and as demand for faculty diversity grows, persons will be present to teach

***The Lutheran World Federation is encouraged ...***

- to accept great appreciation for this consultation and various kinds of ongoing support given to theological education
- to facilitate more intensified cross-fertilization of theological schools both within and across regions, at the levels of information, students and faculty
- to facilitate more frequent encounters of theological educators, and to give attention in such consultations to specific issues and methods





## ISSUE GROUPS: CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

### *Comments by participants*

Participants met separately in four issue groups to discuss particular topics in theological education. In the message issued from the consultation, the conversation from this group was summarized by three broad suggestions:

- The LWF is encouraged to facilitate and coordinate various links among theological institutions and faculty, including attention to networks, Internet discussions, library resources, and directories of faculty, programs and publications.
- Theological institutions are encouraged to develop online courses for continuing education for both clergy and laity.
- The institutions are strongly urged to study gender issues.

The following is a summary of conversations within this group.

### GENERAL THEMES

The topic of contemporary theological education is open to any, and all, current themes and issues in theological education. This issue group discussed the following ten themes.

#### **Lay education**

The group acknowledged the growing emphasis on lay education within the broader context of theological education, and considered possibilities to enhance lay education.

- training provided for Christian educators, diaconal ministry, pastoral assistants
- training for laity who want to enrich their own spirituality or their understanding of tradition, especially in areas where they are a minority
- faculty traveling to the people and providing short intensive training events
- using the Internet to explore possibilities for the future

#### **Continuing education**

Participants report that in some church and country contexts, continuing education is very popular. Such settings often have well-known excellent faculty, interesting topics and good funding. This provides an opportunity for face-to-face contact with peers. In other settings, it



seems that leaders show little interest in continuing education. It was noted that the Internet provides many possibilities for the future. However, we must remember that theological institutions worldwide are on both sides of the digital divide - some are well-equipped to handle on-line courses; others do not have even basic telecommunication resources.

### **Models of education**

Access to current and emerging communication technology (and ongoing maintenance) remains a significant issue. Some regions, churches and theological institutions have almost unlimited access to technical and financial resources. Other regions, churches and theological institutions have difficulty maintaining even the most basic communication technologies. This creates great disparities in the possibilities and models of education that can be considered by theological institutions.

#### **Internet possibilities**

- web-based courses accessible to anyone with a computer, modem and application
- lay education and continuing education, especially for those far from institutions
- faculty with certain specialization can teach via video conferencing in another institution

#### **Extension program possibilities**

- faculty go to a somewhat distant location to teach intensive courses of 2-3 weeks
- faculty exchange programs
- different faculty go out to meet with groups of lay peoples over a several month period
- summer courses

### **Audience for theological education**

Given the growing emphasis on lay education within the broader context of theological education, it was acknowledged that leadership in the church includes ordained, lay and diaconal persons; women and men; and people of all ages. Within the lay population of the church, some serve as designated leaders while others are interested in expanding their theological experience and knowledge. In some areas, the seminaries need to "go to the people" since it is difficult for people to come to the seminaries.

### **Contextual education**

In many places, contextual education serves to ground or base students in a parish during their theological training. It was indicated that classroom instruction needs to be balanced with field work.

## **Faculty issues**

Some general faculty issues were discussed:

- The composition of theological faculties varies widely. In some places, faculties are no longer exclusively white, ordained and male; in other places, this remains the norm.
- It is sometimes unclear what churches expect of their theological schools and faculties.
- How are faculty evaluated beyond their writing and publishing?
- Is theological education solely the domain of the faculty, or should we invite gifted local clergy and laity to contribute to the educational experience?

## **Women's issues**

Participants noted the great disparity in opportunities available to women to pursue theological education. In some theological institutions, women comprise increasing percentages of both faculty and students. In other settings (churches and theological institutions), women are not encouraged to pursue theological education, particularly advanced studies.

## **Funding issues**

Two funding issues were discussed. First, it was noted that in many places churchwide support for theological education is declining, both in absolute and percentage terms. Second, the questions were asked: How are decisions made regarding the number of seminaries needed (in a church or country or area)? What is the role of context and history in such decisions?

## **Content issues**

Several content issues were discussed:

- Beyond preaching and teaching, in some settings, pastors also need to be trained to be community leaders.
- Should pastors be trained as theologians or do they need a broader generalist background?
- In some areas, spiritual formation is an emerging concern.

Current methodologies being explored include: small groups of faculty and students together; various types of worship; prayer partners; guest speakers; retreats; faculty mentors; spiritual directors among faculty; and inclusion of faith-sharing by faculty members in courses.



## **Settings for education**

Some theological institutions are free-standing seminaries, while others are situated within universities which may be secular or church-related. In university settings, certain university requirements and expectations are often imposed on seminary faculty and students. The question was raised: Is the university model the best model for pastoral formation? A separate issue acknowledged with concern that writers and scholars from the north tend to be valued more than those from the south.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

The conversations within issues groups produced suggestions that were not formalized as recommendations by the consultation, but nonetheless are worthy of further consideration.

### ***Churches and theological institutions are encouraged ...***

- to form closer partnerships in theological education
- to consult regarding funding to make institutions more self-sustaining

### ***Churches are encouraged ...***

- to provide opportunities for women for training, higher education, and placement
- to define what they need from theological institutions and address policy issues
- to provide adequate funding for institutions to enable them to be more self-sustaining
- to open structures to enable direct congregational support of specific budget items at theological institutions (e.g. textbooks, scholarships, a faculty position)

### ***Theological institutions are encouraged ...***

- to provide training for faculty for Internet-based courses, provided release time to develop online courses
- to incorporate feminist insights and critiques across the curriculum
- to give attention to personal and spiritual growth of students
- to send to LWF brief summaries of publications by faculty members
- to develop online courses for continuing education of pastors and laity
- to promote study of gender-related issues: violence against women; economic discrimination; inclusive language in lectionary; etc.
- to share what is being published by faculty, particularly those in the south and east

### ***The Lutheran World Federation is encouraged ...***

- to develop a mechanism for follow up and accountability from this consultation
- to link institutions in a partnership arrangement to assist with funding needs (e.g. computers, library books)

- to explore funding resources for student travel, exchanges, scholarships, etc.
- to develop an Internet service group (*listserv*) of Lutheran teaching theologians internationally to enable communication
- to develop a global directory of faculty, including areas of specialization; to post the directory on the LWF website; and to send a hardcopy to theological institutions
- to support all theological institutions in gaining Internet access
- to develop an ecumenical cross-listing of courses available in various locations
- to recommend that the next LWF assembly focus on theological education, or at least have theological education as the subject for an issue group
- to send each theological institution a copy of this report
- to make theological education one of the items of consideration in regional consultations or meetings of church leaders
- to investigate possibilities for online access to library resources
- to put an annotated bibliography of faculty publications on the LWF web site, particularly those by faculty from the south and east
- to create regional clusters of Lutheran teaching theologians





## ISSUE GROUPS: SPIRITUALITY

### *Comments by participants*

Participants met separately in four issue groups to discuss particular topics in theological education. In the message issued from the consultation, the conversation from this group affirmed an emphasis on spirituality in theological education which seeks to recover our Lutheran and ecumenical spiritual traditions, to encourage development of contemporary spiritual practices, and to promote inclusion of spiritual aspects inherent within each discipline across the full curriculum. Such an effort would contribute to theological education and faith formation, and would complement attention to spirituality in all aspects of church life.

The following is a summary of conversations within this group.

### GENERAL THEMES

#### **Survey of current realities and experiences**

Participants in this group provided anecdotal reports with their individual assessments of spirituality at theological institutions where they have taught or are teaching. The reports present a collage of spiritual formation at theological schools around the world.

*Singapore* - At a private seminary, there is chapel five days a week with required attendance, including small group meetings one day each week. In the middle of each semester there is a prayer day. There is a required course on spirituality and a retreat is being planned. The student application process includes a recommendation from the student's pastor and an interview.

*Cameroon* - At a private seminary, student recruitment includes discussion of spirituality, and students have very active involvement in a congregation over 2-3 years of study. There is daily chapel and other worship meetings, but no specific course on spirituality. Teachers are also seen as pastors and minister to students. The emphasis is on a personal relationship with Jesus.



*United States* - Some seminaries no longer have large residential populations. At one seminary in an ecumenical consortium, classes are often a mile away from the Lutheran campus. There is no longer daily chapel, but chapel on one day, Eucharist one day, and vespers in the residence halls on Friday. Students are required to select an elective spirituality course. Students wanting spiritual direction often seek it within the Catholic community which has a tradition of spiritual direction. Spirituality is not a matter considered in student recruitment. Students do field work in a congregation only during one year of studies.

*Brazil* - The theological school has several institutes, such that students have very different class schedules and there is no common time for meeting. The one weekly worship service is a Eucharistic service with fewer than half of the students attending and about two-thirds of the faculty. There is no course on spirituality. One informal independent group meets for prayer and is looked on as "pious." A small prayer room has been set aside, with only a few attending devotions at 0600, 1200, 1800 and 2200. The student recruitment interview includes some discussion of spirituality and a letter of recommendation.

*South Africa* - One theological school has compulsory (by habit) daily morning meditation with scripture and silence. The practice of each teacher leading a devotional group eventually disintegrated. A course on devotional theology is book-based and does not have an exam. Student recruitment includes a letter of recommendation and a probationary year before formal application. At another school in a more pluralistic and ecumenical setting, there is no organized devotional life, although a nearby Lutheran house of studies provides prayer times.

*Taiwan* - Faculty and staff meet one a week for prayer. There is daily chapel and required attendance at mid-week Eucharist. Students lead morning devotions at 0630 with some faculty attending. There is class sharing time once a week, and a course on spirituality every two years. Student recruitment includes an interview and a letter of recommendation.

*Germany* - In the university setting, theological study is not necessarily training for ministry. The wider church is studying an accompanying or fellowship process with retreats for ministry students. In the seminary setting, the focus on spirituality may include regional groups with a mentor, daily Bible study, morning prayer, and an emphasis on student leadership. In courses, emphasis is placed on personal reflection and spirituality, including exercises for voice and body.

*Japan* - In a private seminary, there is daily chapel, weekly Eucharist. And evening prayer once a week. There are retreats several times a year and social service activities with the needy. Students participate in local congregations with a seven-month internship. Student application requires a letter of recommendation.

*Nigeria* - There is no separate course on spirituality but it is emphasized in all courses. There is compulsory daily worship with varied programs, and one quiet day each semester with a presentation and meditation (e.g. on leadership with Moses as model) and ending with Eucharist. Students are assigned to pastoral care groups. Recruitment includes letters of recommendation, but "spirituality" is often confused with "moral living."

Several questions and observations were highlighted in the follow up discussion:

- How can we make better use of the resources for spiritual formation from other faith communities?
- Is spirituality considered in the recruitment and selection of professors?
- Are faculty members equipped for leadership in spirituality?
- Residential training, although expensive, is crucial to nurture spirituality.
- Women's perspectives bring a valuable accent on spirituality.
- Church history can seek to discern the spirituality of men and women from the past.

### **Visions for the future**

Following the survey of current realities and experiences, the participants expressed visions for the future of spirituality in theological education and in the church. The array of visions included the following:

- transformation of our way of doing theology to include all of the human being - spiritual, psychological and physical
- more emphasis on training for ministry
- an emphasis on spirituality which seeks to recover our spiritual traditions of the past - including spiritual practices and exercises, both individual and collective

### **SUGGESTIONS**

The conversations within issues groups produced suggestions that were not formalized as recommendations by the consultation, but nonetheless are worthy of further consideration.

#### ***Churches are encouraged ...***

- to develop programs for the ongoing spiritual formation of ministers and leaders at all levels
- to provide opportunities for church leaders to become better acquainted with other spiritual traditions within Christianity and beyond
- to develop spiritual resources for children and young adults

#### ***Theological institutions are encouraged ...***

- to integrate spirituality into every aspect of the curriculum



- to foster contact between students and their home congregations
- to offer courses specifically on spirituality
- to invite professors or spiritual leaders from other Christian traditions to teach, speak or lead in worship
- to establish a process for spiritual guidance or accompaniment for students and professors ("mutual consolation and conversation")
- to offer retreats or course time devoted to spiritual exercise; special worship services or meals; celebrations of the liturgical year
- to provide spiritual retreat opportunities for faculty, including individual trips to existing spiritual centers
- to establish a place for meditation, prayer and worship, which is carefully decorated to encourage spiritual expression
- to reflect on Christian art, architecture and music as a part of practical theology
- to include spirituality as a criterion (if applicable) for recruiting faculty and students
- to give higher priority to training for ministry and provide opportunities for practical experience in ministry throughout theological study

***The Lutheran World Federation is encouraged ...***

- to carry out a study on Lutheran spiritual heritage
- to include spirituality in LWF-sponsored regional training programs
- to translate and publish regional studies on spirituality
- to provide support for sabbatical opportunities for spiritual formation

## ISSUE GROUPS: ECUMENICAL EDUCATION

### *Comments by participants*

Participants met separately in four issue groups to discuss particular topics in theological education. In the message issued from the consultation, the conversation from this group was summarized by affirming that ecumenical education is essential for programs of theological education in our churches. Leaders in ministry must be knowledgeable about particular aspects of ecumenical relations that include ecumenical history, ecumenical participation and cooperation, ecumenical dialogue and ecumenical commitments. Ecumenical education must also include experience in particular ecumenical activities.

The following is a summary of conversations within this group which included two ecumenical guests who were participants in the consultation.

### GENERAL THEMES

#### **The goal of the ecumenical movement**

Though there are a variety of ways of describing the ecumenical movement, participants in this group see it in the context of *the whole household of God as understood by Christians*. In this context, the ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement finds its roots in Christ's prayer that "all may be one" (Jn 17). As we cling to the eschatological hope that we will one day be one in Christ, we recognize the penultimate goal of working and praying incessantly for Christian unity *now*. It was further acknowledged that unity does not mean uniformity. Rather, our goal is to work towards visible signs of unity by creating bonds of communion among Christians while respecting diversity.

We understand that ecumenical relations and commitment are not mere options for Christians, but are an essential part of God's call to us. The mission of the church depends upon Christian unity which manifests itself in mutual respect, recognition, cooperation and a yearning for fuller *communio*. The scandal of disunity within Christianity seriously hinders the mission of the church in the world. We see our ecumenical efforts as a way of becoming more credible witnesses to Christ in a pluralistic world.



## **The goal of ecumenical education**

We take as a point of departure for this topic the description offered in the preface of *The Teaching of Ecumenics*:

“The purpose of teaching ecumenism is twofold. First, to do so on its own merits as a discipline, to pursue research on what has divided the churches in the past, the current situation in interchurch negotiations and the contemporary issues facing the ecumenical movement. Secondly, to bring in the ecumenical perspective, the unity of church and unity of humankind, in all the disciplines and the totality of the teaching and learning experience.”<sup>1</sup>

In this context, the goal is also to teach ecumenics in such a way that we are all transformed by the educational experience. Our hope is that those who are engaged in ecumenical studies will become partners in dialogue. As they come to a greater understanding of the ecumenical movement and as they actively embrace the gift of ecumenical relations, we hope that they will become agents of ecumenical cooperation and promoters of Christian unity.

## **Critical challenges**

- 1) Among Christians, the diverse understandings of mission present the primary challenge for ecumenical education. For some, mission is witness to one's faith in one's contextual situation. For others, mission means an attempt to add people to one's specific church. We are challenged to find ways to build bridges with all who are part of God's household in Christ, seeking creative means of cooperation, and anticipating growth towards unity.
- 2) A second challenge is the relationship of interfaith dialogue with ecumenical education. Many students live in a multi-cultural situation where encounters with people of other faiths are daily realities. We need to describe more fully the goals of interfaith dialogue when doing ecumenical studies.
- 3) A third challenge regards confessional identity and ecumenical commitment. Some consider the ecumenical movement as an alternative to church membership. However, the ecumenical movement is not a church. It presupposes that those who are committed to ecumenism belong to a particular denomination or church. As Lutherans, we are challenged

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Amirtham and Cyris H.S. Moon, eds., *The Teaching of Ecumenics* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1987), p. 7.

to have a clear confessional identity and at the same time to recognize that our Lutheran identity includes an ecumenical commitment.

### **Practical vision and hope**

Re-visioning theological education includes practical dimensions which include the challenges of ecumenical education. The participants chose to express the practical dimensions of this vision in the language of *hope*.

- We *hope* that ecumenical education will be rooted in biblical studies and that it will recognize that the biblical message has practical consequences that can be passed on to the next generation. One of the most effective means of ecumenical learning is by studying the Bible together.
- We *hope* that ecumenical education will help students discern concrete ways of searching for cooperation; that they would learn by doing -- that is, by actually being involved in ecumenical activities.
- We *hope* that ecumenical education will include not only study and action together, but also prayer. We see spirituality as a major component of the ecumenical education of the future.
- We *hope* that ecumenical education will not simply be a study of dry doctrines, but will also be filled with narrative examples of ecumenical cooperation and movement towards communion in real situations.
- We *hope* that ecumenical education will help students understand not only the ultimate goal of unity that will come with the eschaton, but also with current thinking on what it means to grow towards full communion now.

### **SUGGESTIONS**

The conversations within issues groups produced suggestions that were not formalized as recommendations by the consultation, but nonetheless are worthy of further consideration.

#### ***Churches are encouraged ...***

- to teach all students and all church members to promote religious freedom
- to promote among all church members, and especially those involved in theological education, the priority of building bridges between Christians and seeking creative opportunities for dialogue and collaboration
- to avoid in our description of others any harsh language that tends to alienate people, and to seek language that builds up the church



***Theological institutions are encouraged ...***

- to promote ecumenical studies as a discipline with its own merit, that not only focuses on research concerning what has divided the churches in the past and the current situation in interchurch negotiations, but also focuses on contemporary issues facing the ecumenical movement
- to integrate an ecumenical perspective - the unity of church and unity of humankind - in all the disciplines and the totality of teaching and learning experience
- to exercise the stewardship of sharing human and material resources, by promoting ecumenical cooperation
- to make a course in ecumenical studies a requirement within the curriculum and a prerequisite for ordination
- to promote continuing education for pastors and laity in ecumenical studies
- to focus on biblical studies in ecumenical education and encourage ecumenical Bible study
- to promote common prayer and cooperation as an integral part of the ecumenical program
- to facilitate some students to attend theological institutions of other denominations in order to promote greater understanding among Christians
- to enter into agreements or covenants with institutions of other churches as a way of ecumenical cooperation

***The Lutheran World Federation is encouraged ...***

- to facilitate the sharing of experiences and resources within regions and across regions
- to encourage networking especially in light of Internet possibilities
- to facilitate among Lutherans the reception of WCC programs on ecumenical theological education
- to survey which faculties have ecumenical programs and ask them to make their curriculum available to others

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“Deep thoughts -  
Issue Group at work”



“Spirituality is central to Theological Education”



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